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Comments: The quality of this land, the water, and the access to backcountry areas that are still pristine and beautiful should be protected, not arbitrarily put up for grabs. I have skied at and around the larger Mt. Bachelor area for years, and I bike, hike, and camp on these lands as well. My connection to the Deschutes National Forest is deep-seated and local, and that is precisely why the vagueness of this proposal troubles me as much as it does. Rather than giving the public a clear picture of what is planned on public land, the agency has offered wording so thin it reads more like a loophole than a genuine invitation to participate. I oppose the 2026 Newberry Geothermal Consent to Lease and ask that the agency address the following points.

The Project Summary states that "The Deschutes National Forest is responding to a Bureau of Land Management (BLM) request to grant consent to lease approximately 29,477 acres of nominated National Forest System lands for geothermal exploration and development." That is the sum of what the public is given about what will actually happen on these acres. No estimated number of wells, no road miles, no pipeline or transmission corridors, no surface disturbance footprint appears in the document. Without a reasonably foreseeable development scenario, the public cannot identify the impacts it is being asked to evaluate, and the Environmental Assessment cannot define a meaningful scope of analysis or determine significance. The agency must publish a project description that includes at minimum a reasonably foreseeable development scenario with estimated surface disturbance before proceeding further, and I ask that it respond to this specific gap.

The Project Summary also states that "nominated National Forest System lands for geothermal exploration and development. This decision is an administrative action only." Those two characterizations cannot sit comfortably side by side. Labeling the consent an administrative action only implies the agency has already concluded this is not a major federal action significantly affecting the environment, yet that threshold question is the precise determination a NEPA analysis is supposed to answer before the agency selects an EA over an EIS. By calling it administrative before completing the analysis, the agency appears to have pre-decided the outcome the process is meant to reach. I want the agency to publish a written threshold determination explaining why consenting to lease nearly 30,000 acres of National Forest System land for geothermal exploration and development does not constitute a major federal action, or to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement instead.

The Project Overview confirms that an Environmental Assessment has been chosen as the analysis type while the project status remains "Developing Proposal." No published extraordinary-circumstances evaluation or categorical-exclusion review justifying that choice for lands described as "grant consent to lease approximately 29,477 acres of nominated National Forest System lands for geothermal exploration and development" appears in the document. Committing to an analysis tier before the proposal is even fully developed is not a substitute for the significance determination that tier requires. If the agency cannot sustain the rationale for an EA, it should prepare an EIS, and the public deserves to see that rationale before the analysis type is finalized.

I am left feeling the government is trying to be sneaky, and that is not how decisions about public land should feel to the people who use and love them. These lands belong to everyone, and the process for deciding their future should reflect that plainly.