



OCHOCOTRAILS

July 6, 2021

Crook County Court
320 NW Court St.
Prineville, OR 97754

Re: Lemon Gulch Mountain Biking Trail Proposal

Gentlemen:

The Mill Creek property owners, grazing permittees, and adjacent landowners have submitted a document that outlines their concerns about the proposed mountain biking trails in the Lemon Gulch area of the Ochoco National Forest. We would like to take this opportunity to discuss these concerns, as well as provide some context for the trail proposal.

The Lemon Gulch mountain biking trails are being proposed by Ochoco Trails, a community-based coalition that includes mountain bike riders, hikers, equestrians, hunters, a permittee, environmental groups, and the business community. We came together in 2017 at the request of the Chamber of Commerce and the Forest Service to develop a trails plan for the Ochoco National Forest because they were being inundated with non-motorized trail proposals.

Our aim was to develop trails that are supported by the community and that offer the experiences desired by all types of trail users, while minimizing the impact on wildlife. We are disappointed that our efforts with respect to Lemon Gulch have been met with opposition, and we remain fully committed to working with the permittees and neighbors to find a mutually agreeable solution.

The neighbors and permittees raised concerns about road maintenance, travel speeds on the proposed trails, impact of the proposed trails, and financial concerns. Our comments on these topics are outlined below.

Road Maintenance

- Road 33, which leads to the proposed Lemon Gulch trails, is a county road that currently provides access to Wildcat Campground and nearby trailheads. The road successfully accommodates the traffic of visitors to these sites, and to our knowledge, no safety concerns have been reported to the County. While the Lemon Gulch trails will increase the use of this road, the increased use could justify raising its maintenance priority and enhance requests for grant funding.

Travel Speeds

- The trails at Lemon Gulch will be purpose-built to provide the type of experience mountain bike riders want. These trails will be designed and built with technical features such as rocks and sloped turns, which all act to control rider speed. In contrast to the predominantly straight design found in many multi-user trails (which facilitate higher speeds), these trails will be built using state-of-the-art design specifically for bike use.
- Any section of trail that allows for increased speed will be constructed with good sight lines so riders can see well ahead of them, allowing them to easily slow or stop for any cattle that might be present.
- The trails can be designed to avoid areas where cows congregate, such as watering holes, and signage can be posted to emphasize the importance of not spooking cattle.
- There are many locations where mountain bike trails are present on grazing lands, including in the Ochoco National Forest and Crooked River National Grassland. We do not believe the Forest Service has received any reports of mountain bike/cattle interactions that have injured either animals or riders.

Impact of the Proposed Trails

- The Ochoco Trails group recognized the lack of purpose-built trails for mountain bikes in the Ochoco National Forest and undertook a multi-year process to identify areas where a sustainable bike network could be built. Of the various locations Ochoco Trails considered, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife and Forest Service biologists' preliminary assessment was that Lemon Gulch would have the least impact on wildlife and natural resources.
- Developing an area to provide a robust trail system for the growing sport of mountain biking will alleviate pressure on other areas of the Ochoco National Forest, thus dispersing recreation within the Forest.
- The Ochoco National Forest is currently engaged in a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review of the impacts of the proposed project. A big part of this analysis will be to solicit comments from the public to guide the design of the project before any decisions are made.
- Many mountain bike trail systems in Oregon are also on grazing lands, including the Oregon Timber Trail, Cline Buttes, and Horse Butte trail systems. Mountain bikers share the land peacefully with cattle in these areas and many more. Most mountain bikers who would ride at Lemon Gulch are accustomed to riding through grazing lands and know the proper etiquette to close gates and to stop when they encounter a cow to avoid disturbing it or causing it to change its behavior. As has occurred on other grazing lands, cows will quickly become accustomed to riders and riders to cows.
- If a Forest doesn't provide the recreational experiences people seek, the public tends to establish user-created trails that, through a lack of design and poor siting, can disturb wildlife and severely damage the natural resource. By providing a robust trail system that provides the experience mountain biker riders desire, Lemon Gulch will channel use to an area that can handle it, reducing illegal uses of the forest.

Financial Concerns

- The Forest Service will rely on volunteer groups to fund and maintain the Lemon Gulch trail system, as it does elsewhere. The volunteer group that will steward the Lemon Gulch trail system is the Central Oregon Trail Alliance (COTA). This nonprofit organization, formed in 1992, has a full-time employee and is on track to raise more than \$300,000—not including a \$50,000 pledge for the Lemon Gulch system—and log more than 10,000 volunteer labor hours in 2021. Clearly, COTA has the capacity to maintain the trail system.
- In 2019, livestock grazing on National Forests added \$550 million to the economy. In contrast, recreation on National Forest land generated \$12.5 billion. Mountain bikers spend an average of \$491 per person on a weekend mountain biking trip. In the small community of Oakridge, Oregon, a recent study found that visiting mountain bikers added \$2.3-\$4.9 million per year to the economy.
- A new study conducted by Travel Oregon, Oregon Office of Recreation and Oregon Fish and Wildlife found that in 2019 outdoor recreation supported more than 224,000 full and part-time jobs statewide and generated \$9.3 billion in wages and compensation. The study also found that in 2019, outdoor recreation in Oregon supported \$15.6 billion in spending.

USDA NATIONAL FORESTS SUPPORTING THE ECONOMY		
2019	Jobs	GDP
National Forest Resource		
Livestock Grazing	14,200	\$550 Million
Minerals & Energy Production	37,300	\$5.5 Billion
Recreation & Wildlife Visitor Use	153,800	\$12.5 Billion
Forest Products	44,700	\$4.1 Billion
Resource Management Investments	122,800	\$12 Billion
Payments to States & Counties	10,800	\$1 Billion
Total Economical Effect	383,600 Jobs	\$35 Billion

Source: US Forest Service/USDA

Conclusion

In summary, Ochoco Trails and COTA are committed to working with those currently opposing the project to find solutions that will mitigate their concerns and create a win win situation for all involved. We urge the County Court to encourage the permittees and neighbors to work with us to find mutually-agreeable solutions to their concerns.

Sincerely,

Darlene W. Henderson
Chair, Ochoco Trails