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Bikes vs. Bovines: Trail Planning in Rural Meets Opposition

BY **MAUREEN GAFFNEY**

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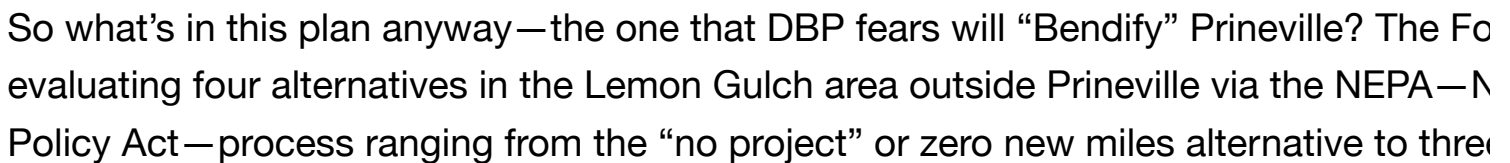
Photo courtesy of Travis Holman

About 35 miles from the mountain bike mecca of Bend, Oregon lies Prineville, population 10,000. Surrounded by Ochoco National Forest (ONF), it is a small town in a rural county in the heart of the West—others—is experiencing change. When the group *Ochoco Trails* proposed a broad suite of trail improvements to existing trails, horse camps, staging areas and the like over a diverse

in 2018, they and their many partner organizations had good reason to be encouraged. the horse people, bike stuff for the bike people, all with a relatively light footprint on the What's not to love?

For the small but vocal group “Don’t Bend Prineville,” the answer to that question is—*Prineville* (DBP) does not have a website or a discernable head of organization, but the group’s mission as “A Grassroots Movement to Keep the Custom and Culture of Prineville Through Thoughtful well-Managed Growth.”

“Bend is the poster child for radical change in Central Oregon, in a few short decades it’s going from logging to a tourist destination” said Christopher Joosen, Recreation, Heritage, Lands & Forest Officer with the Ochoco National Forest. As such, Joosen understands the concerns of the National Forest lands belong to the American people and that “one (use) doesn’t eliminate the ability to preserve heritage and provide for recreation uses at the same time.”



between 19 and 51 miles of trails ranging in difficulty from beginner to advanced. While technically be multi-use and available to all, they would also be purpose-built for mountain bikers.

Travis Holman, Board of Directors Vice President for COTA—Central Oregon Trails Alliance, said the proposed Lemon Gulch trails will provide a little bit of everything. “This system would provide a wide range. There would be more techy rock trails here than in the rest of Oregon, and technical. The Lemon Gulch trails will be designed with mountain bikers in mind, with directional routes as well as a 15-mile cross country ridge ride.”



Travis Holman's not kidding around when he says the new trails would be "technical"! That's a mighty big drop s

If that doesn't sound very horse-friendly, you're right. It's not. But Lemon Gulch is only proposal and horse facilities are a part of the overall plan.

Kim McCarrel is a long-time resident of Bend and represents both *Oregon Equestrian Trail Horsemen* at *Ochoco Trails*. Hearing from fellow equestrians about increasing conflicts and riders of horses, she describes having an "Aha!" moment. "If we build more bike trails on hiker and equestrian trails!" This sensible, fair-minded and frankly generous outlook *Trails*, a group whose mission statement describes "...a community-based coalition dedicated to maintaining a sustainable non-motorized trail system that offers a desirable range of experiences and enhancing forest resources for future generations."

Formed in 2017 in response to increasing growth and occasional trail conflict between nearby Lookout Mountain, *Ochoco Trails* is an umbrella organization that collaborates with organizations including Oregon Equestrian Trails, Central Oregon Trails Alliance (COTA), Hunters Association and the U.S. Forest Service.

"Not planning for recreation doesn't mean there won't be recreation. People will build trails coming and we feel it's best to plan for it" said Darlene Henderson, Chair of *Ochoco Trails*.

"Before the Ochoco Trails group formed, we were getting conflicting proposals from different groups. We brought respective interests to the table and made a lot of 'deconflicting progress'" noted the U.S. Forest Service.

When I asked each of these representatives from different organizations and perspectives about Prineville's specific objections to the proposal, each were at a loss. The words "change in demographics", "NIMBY" and "culture war" weaved through the respective comments. On the DBP Facebook page referenced above requesting an interview for this story, the response from Boyd was as follows:

“One would think that the mountain biking community would be all about protecting the case of the Lemon Gulch project that is anything but true. This proposal, with huge inroads country for bike paths as well as massive parking/staging areas, would have massive, negative impacts on the environment and ecology of the area. Aside from the adverse impacts on adjacent ranches, the project will disrupt the habitat of deer, elk, bear, and dozens of other animal species that the Forest Service in pushing this project has ignored its own rules. They need to start the process over this time. And for the potential mountain bike users of this proposed project, most of whom live in the area, why don't you use what is already available without the disruption this project will cause? There are hundreds of miles of existing forest service roads in the region that responsible riders can use. In Crook County and elsewhere, riders do exactly that and those pushing for this project should be ashamed.”

Representatives from Ochoco Trails, COTA and the US Forest Service all reference the organization among those represented by Ochoco Trails with a specific mountain biking trail proposals to the Forest Service for initial feedback. Of those four, only the Lemon Gulch project passed the first screening for sensitive resources like elk, was in a location already disturbed by private grazing, and was in close enough proximity to the town that it would provide a tangible benefit. As for the above-referenced “massive parking/staging areas,” a 20-vehicle lot is proposed with a toilet.



Courtesy of Travis Holman

In keeping with its proscribed process, the Forest Service then embarked on the public several public meetings and a site visit with adjacent residents and grazing permit hold feel it had not received enough input from interested parties and paused the process to collect more data, and to hear more feedback. The result of the NEPA process is an EIS due out in June of this year.

Kim McCarrel the equestrian summed it up thusly: “Bikes are a symbol of change. And change. The timber industry has dried up, grazing continues, but it’s harder—fences, u make it harder to make a living in the same way. Heck, little Prineville got a Facebook c of the town is changing.”

MAUREEN GAFFNEY

Maureen lives in Carbondale, CO. She writes better than she rides but she don't care cause Creative Writing from Mills College and refuses to buy a gravel bike cuz she's old and cranky shitty fire road part." But she'll knuckle under soon.



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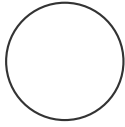
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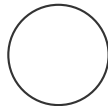
John Fisch 1 month ago

“There are literally hundreds of miles of existing forest service roads in the region that riders could use.”

Roads

I haven't studied this area, so I don't have an opinion on the viability or suitability of road development. But when an anti mountain bike advocate says there's plenty of roads you know right away, he has no intention of discussing the issue rationally or honestly.

^ 1 v



Maureen Gaffney 1 month ago

Reply to John Fisch

Author

Exactly. Don't you love that one? "I dunno why you can't just ride on the roads"

^ 0 v

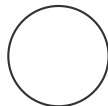


Hap Proctor 1 month ago

I first visited Bend in the mid 80's when it was a quiet town of 20,000 citizens. I never rode a mountain bike. Quite different now..... A few years ago, I asked a local where poor people lived and was told....Prineville. Sisters and Redmond have exploded in size. I can see why some of Prineville's finest might want to protect what they have. I love to visit there every summer, but can understand if it isn't every local's dream.

East Burke, Vermont has discovered there are problems when the bike trails exceed what the town's infrastructure can support.

^ 0 v



Maureen Gaffney 1 month ago

Reply to Hap Proctor

Author

Yeah, I think this is happening in a LOT of towns across the country. It's a constant state of change I suppose...

^ 0 v



Hap Proctor ⌚ 1 month ago

| *Reply to Maureen Gaffney*

For sure, and if they build those trails, I'm going to ride them. Prineville is so it might become the go to spot during the snowy winter months.

^ 0 v



Burthardin ⌚ 1 month ago

Pleased to see my map in this article. Sometimes I create these things and th

^ 0 v

Tags: Trails | cota, lemon gulch, nepa, ochoco national forest, prineville oregon, travis holman

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