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Providing more perspective on Lemon **Gulch project**

Let's hope project is shining example of what different public land user groups can achieve

▲ Travis Holman 🋗 October 19 2021

when we work together On Oct. 6, 2021, The Central Oregonian published an article about the Lemon Gulch trail system, a proposed 50-mile mountain bike trail system in the Ochoco National Forest. This article provides additional perspectives on the

project.

The proposed Lemon Gulch trail system is one part of the 2019 Sustainable Trails Plan by Ochoco Trails, "a coalition of mountain bike riders, equestrians, hikers, hunters, ranchers, and business people from the Prineville area." Lemon Gulch is only one portion of the plan. It would provide mountain biking trails on roughly 3,000 acres (0.3% of the 850,000-acre Ochoco National Forest).

The Ochoco Trails coalition was convened in 2017 by the U.S. Forest Service and Crook County Chamber of Commerce. With a growing local population and increased recreation use in



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CENTRAL OREGONIAN - Travis Holman

the Ochoco National Forest, a proactive approach was deemed necessary to plan a sustainable future for non-motorized recreational opportunities. After nearly two years of effort, the coalition submitted its plan to the Forest Service.

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Opposing parties claim that the process was secretive and they were not given opportunity to be involved; however, ranchers have been part of Ochoco Trails since its inception. Additionally, there was a public open house in 2018 attended by 100 people, the project was presented to the --Proposed Lemon Gulch Mountain Biking Trail Network Supported by Multiple Stakeholders -- Crook County Natural Resource Committee in 2019, and the USFS opened the public comment period in early 2021 as part of the NEPA review process. Ochoco Trails also has a website and social media presence with project updates.

Opposing parties claim that other areas were not considered, which is not true. While preparing the Sustainable Trails Plan, the Forest Service considered multiple areas for a mountain bike trail network. Lemon Gulch emerged as the area with the fewest impacts on wildlife and other resources.

Opposing parties claim that the cattle grazing is not compatible with mountain biking. However, mountain biking coexists with grazing in many local areas, including the Ochocos, Crooked River National Grassland, Horse Ridge and Horse Butte east of Bend, and Cline Butte southwest of Redmond, as well as throughout the western United States.

Neither Ochoco Trails nor Central Oregon Trail Alliance (COTA) have ever wished to push out forest permittees. Since this conflict arose, our goal has been, and still is, to mitigate their concerns with trail design, layout and education. COTA, a local mountain bike trail stewardship and advocacy group and a member of Ochoco Trails, respects ranchers' use of public land and has a strong history working with them on projects such as installing gates and cattle guards around Central Oregon. COTA also works to educate riders about proper behavior in areas where cattle are present.

Lemon Gulch is the first significant project brought forth by the Ochoco Trails coalition and is an important test for collaborative processes in Central Oregon and beyond. If the Forest Service were to block this project at the urging of a very small number of private parties, what incentive do stakeholders have to come to the table and do the hard work of compromising in the future? Let's hope this project comes out as a shining example of what different public land user groups can achieve when we work together.

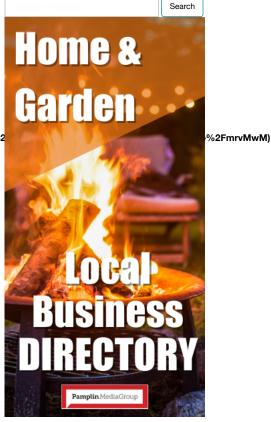
Travis Holman is the vice president of Central Oregon Trail Alliance. He can be reached at travis.holman@cotamtb.com (mailto:travis.holman@cotamtb.com).

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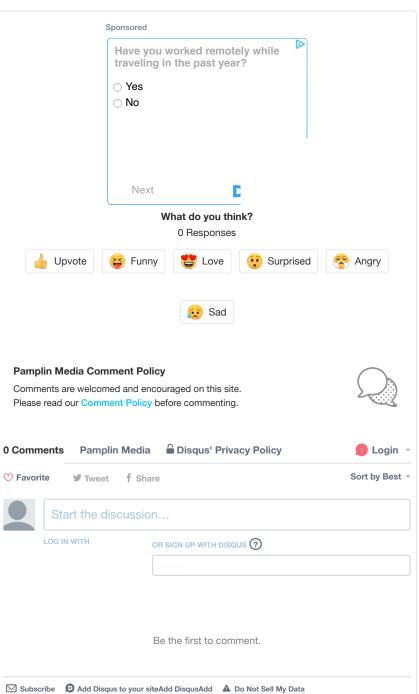


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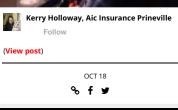
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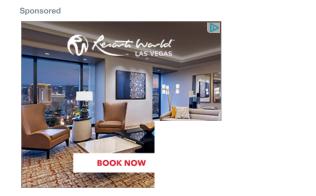
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This article brought to you courtesy of teh Beehive, News-Times Insider Senior Living Expert.







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