Lemon Gulch Trails Project
Fact Sheet and Frequently Asked Questions

Project Description and Background
The Ochoco National Forest initially proposed the Lemon Gulch Trails Project in March 2021. It involves the creation of multi-use trails designed for mountain biking in the Mill Creek watershed on the Ochoco National Forest and is part of a Forest-wide effort to improve trail opportunities for non-motorized uses such as mountain biking, horse-back riding, hiking, and trail running.

At Lemon Gulch, the Forest Service is looking at a range of trail miles in four different configurations. Alternatives 2 was the original proposal. Alternatives 3, 4, and 5 were created by reducing the amount of trail miles to address concerns with wildlife habitat and grazing management. These alternatives provide a means for comparing the type and intensity of effects against the no action (Alternative 1). The analysis is underway and will be made available for public review and comment when completed. Information on how to be notified when the environmental assessment is available is provided later in this document.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Alternative</th>
<th>Miles of Trail by Difficulty</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Beginner</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>9.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A low level of development (e.g. native surface parking sites with informal parking, a single vault toilet, and signage) would maintain a rustic character. Having lower, middle and upper parking sites would allow people to leave one vehicle at the bottom and drive to the middle or top to start their ride, though some people may opt to start at any of them.

The trails would be built to mountain biking standards and would be available for mountain biking, trail running, and hiking. Some trails would be designed for adaptive mountain biking equipment used by people with disabilities. Equestrian use would be discouraged on the trails and dogs would not be welcome on the trails before July 1st.

Where did this project originate?
A multi-year collaborative effort by Ochoco Trails (ochocotrails.org), which is a group made up of representatives of user groups and stakeholders, resulted in Forest-wide proposals for trails that would meet existing and growing demand for outdoor recreation. Following internal review of these proposals, the Forest Service chose to move forward with this and others that address equestrian, biker, and hiker interests.

How much use will the trails receive and how will you maintain them?
Though some are concerned that this will create an exponential increase in visitors to the Forest, this just isn’t the case. It is expected that the first year the trails are available, there may be extra interest which could lead to the main lower trailhead having more than a typical number of vehicles. Initial capacity will be for up to 20 vehicles at a lower parking area, with smaller areas in the middle and upper parking, and will take advantage of areas that may be used as log landings during upcoming forest thinning project.

Comparable trailheads on a nice day usually have about 10 to 20 vehicles, such as the Lookout Mountain trail. Trailheads see more use on weekends, especially holiday weekends, than
weekdays. As requested by the public, the Forest Service is planning a phased approach for the project which would mean an initial set of trails would be installed, followed by one to two years of monitoring to determine if moving forward with more trails is warranted.

With our partners, individual volunteers, youth crews, and Forest Service crew, more miles of trail are being maintained across the Forest faster than ever before. The Lemon Gulch trails would be adopted by Ochoco Trails and Central Oregon Trail Alliance to ensure they receive annual and adequate maintenance.

**How can the National Forest support this use as well as other uses such as livestock grazing?**

Public lands across the west successfully support multiple uses in the same space including recreation and livestock grazing. Educating visitors is a key component of successfully sharing the land. The public would be informed about the land management activities and other uses of the National Forest that will be seen and heard in the area. For example, the public would be informed about the extent of grazing season so they could choose to avoid the trails during that time, and we would also provide educational materials on how to behave when livestock are encountered on a trail. The forest is actively managed, and plans are currently underway for restoration thinning and fuels reduction across the same landscape. During logging and underburning activities trail segments may be closed to ensure public safety.

**Why is the Forest Service considering this project?**

The Forest Service is interested in providing recreational opportunities in a manner that considers the needs of other recreational user groups, other forest uses, and the natural resources, and meets the current and growing demand for this type of trail experience. The project’s location provides a combination of good terrain and proximity to town, and accounts for forest-wide objectives for big game habitat. The project also is consistent with the objectives of the Ochoco Forest Plan to provide non-motorized trail opportunities for mountain bikers.

A sustainable trail system is an appropriate use of National Forest System lands and would benefit the Prineville community as well as those who come to visit from elsewhere. Recreation and tourism, including recreational opportunities on National Forest System lands, contribute significantly to the economy and culture of Crook County and Prineville.

**Won’t more people visiting the Forest increase problems such as litter, weeds, and fire risk, or degraded roads?**

General presence of Forest Service recreation crews and Field Rangers interacting with visitors as well as fire patrols would increase in the area. The project is proposed to be completed in phases. Following monitoring of the initial phase, the Forest Service could choose to add a dumpster and garbage collection to the lower trailhead if deemed necessary.

The main road leading onto National Forest System lands is under the jurisdiction of the County. The public uses the road to access private residences as well as the many amenities of the National Forest, including Steins Pillar, Wildcat Campground, and the Mill Creek Wilderness. A recent count shows an average of 300 daily trips on this road. Additional vehicles at the level anticipated is not expected to not noticeably contribute to degraded road conditions, though monitoring of conditions after the first phase could lead to recommending more frequent maintenance activities if necessary.

**How can I participate in the planning process for this project?**

You can subscribe yourself to email updates for this and all Ochoco National Forest projects. Go to https://www.fs.usda.gov/projects/ochoco/landmanagement/projects, enter your email address into the box at the middle of the page, and then follow the prompts.
What stage of the NEPA process is the project currently in and what are the next steps?

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) provides a process by which the agency considers and discloses to the public the environmental impacts in their decision-making process. As shown in the graphic below, the project is in the effects analysis stage.

The Forest Service is currently conducting an analysis of the potential effects from the proposed trails system. The effects will be disclosed in an environmental assessment (EA). The public will have an opportunity to review and comment on the EA when it is released later this spring.

If you subscribe at the link provided above, you will receive notification when the comment period begins. The trails are planned to be constructed in phases rather than all at once and no work would begin until the NEPA process is complete and a final decision is issued. We anticipate a final decision to be issued late summer.