

# Briefing Paper

**Pacific Northwest Region – Ochoco National Forest**

## **Ochoco Summit Trail System Project**

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

**March 2016**

#### **What is this project?**

The project proposes to designate a trail system in the Ochocos specifically for off-highway vehicles. The trail would be open seasonally and it would be built using mostly existing roads and trails tied together by some currently open roads. It would be a system where motorcycles, quads, side-by-sides, and Jeeps could ride trails designed specifically for enjoyment and recreation. The trail system would be accessed at designated staging areas, parking areas, or trailheads.

The current Supplemental Draft EIS has five alternatives for the trail system that range in distance from 101 miles to 212 miles. See the alternative maps to better visualize what is being proposed.

#### **Why is this trail system being proposed?**

The idea for this system originated in 2009 when the Ochoco National Forest conducted travel management planning. The 2005 Travel Management Rule required the forest to designate a system of roads, trails, and areas for motorized use and to prohibit cross-country travel. Under the motorized travel system adopted in 2011, recreational OHV users lost a lot of opportunity. More than 80 percent of the forest was made off-limits to OHV use and most of the roads still open to OHV driving lack connectivity and must be shared with cars and trucks. Through an engineering analysis, some system roads were also deemed unsafe for mixing non-street legal OHVs with passenger vehicles and commercial traffic.

Through a series of public meetings and discussions with interested parties, the Forest Service agreed to develop a proposal for a trail system to provide recreational OHV users a suitable, enforceable and sustainable riding opportunity in the Ochocos. This is the proposal that has been developed to meet that need.

The Forest Service plans to reduce the instances of resource damage occurring from unauthorized and unethical off-road driving in the forest by providing the OHV community a suitable and sustainable place where they want to ride. Designating an OHV trail system also enables the Forest Service to apply for grant funding to provide trail maintenance, visitor information and law enforcement patrols.

#### **How did we get here?**

Planning for this project began nearly 9 years ago while the forest was still conducting travel management planning. A subgroup of the Deschutes Provincial Advisory Committee helped forest planners to identify general zones of agreement where they should start looking to locate a proposed trail system. They identified the general forest planning area identified in the attached map.

Planners proceeded to work through potential resource conflicts while meeting with interested groups and the general public to refine their proposals. In spring of 2014 the Forest Service released a Draft EIS and in late summer they released a Final EIS and draft Record of Decision for the project. The final EIS and draft ROD were withdrawn following the Bailey Butte fire and the forest spent more time engaging interested parties to further refine proposals.



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## **BRIEFING PAPER - (continued)**

### **Where are we at in the process?**

In late February, the Forest Service released a Supplemental Draft EIS. The public comment period for the SDEIS ends April 4, 2016.

Following the SDEIS, planners will compile and review all comments received and those comments will help shape the Final EIS. Comments received and the Forest Service response to comments will be included in the Final EIS as an appendix.

The Final EIS will be accompanied by a Draft Record of Decision. Those who commented during a previous comment period have the opportunity to file an objection to the draft decision. The Forest will then attempt to resolve objections. Following the objection resolution, the Forest Supervisor may choose to sign a Final Record of Decision that implements a chosen alternative, or parts of different alternatives.

### **What did you do with past comments and objections to the project?**

Forest staff and interdisciplinary team members met with individuals and groups to discuss issues, interests and comments. A number of changes were made from the original DEIS to the recently released SDEIS as a direct result of public and stakeholder comments.

### **How can I participate right now?**

You can submit written comments to forest planners either by email or written letter. The most useful comments are specific and raise an issue with the analysis. *Example: The proposed trail system passes directly by my favorite dispersed camp site on Forest Road XX. That area is often very muddy in the spring and could be damaged by heavy ATV traffic.*

See the SDEIS for instructions on where to deliver comments. You can find a link to project documents on the Ochoco NF home page: [www.fs.usda.gov/ochoco](http://www.fs.usda.gov/ochoco)

### **If the trail system is adopted, is that the ONLY place I could ride an OHV?**

No. Adoption of an OHV trail system does not eliminate the riding opportunities currently in effect on motorized mixed-use roads. An OHV trail system would be new riding opportunity in addition to what already exists.

### **How would this trail system affect other recreation trails?**

The proposed trail system does not overlap other recreational trails, but it does incorporate some existing open and closed roads. The trail is intended to provide motorized recreationists a separate place to ride.

### **Would this affect wild horses?**

The proposed trail system is completely outside of the Big Summit Herd Management Area.

### **What about wildlife?**

Any increase in people and/or motor vehicles will have some effect on wildlife, but the Forest Service does not feel this seasonal trail system will affect the viability of any of the wildlife species within the project area, and design criteria for the project are intended to preserve habitat.

### **Will this trail increase fire danger?**

We don't think so. All OHVs require a valid spark arrestor. Forest visitors, including OHV riders, would still be subject to seasonal fire restrictions, which are based on fuel moisture trends and weather. Usually, fire restrictions regulate camp fires and chain saws, but the Forest Service could temporarily restrict riding on the OHV trail if fire danger were high enough.

### **What if people abuse the trail system?**

Recreation managers will monitor trail use and work with OHV riding clubs to solve problems that might occur. The Forest Service reserves the right to restrict use of the OHV trail if problems persist.