

Briefing Paper

Pacific Northwest Region – Ochoco National Forest

Ochoco Summit Trail System Project

Frequently Asked Questions

September 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 Final Supplemental EIS has five alternatives for the trail system that range in distance from 124 miles (Alt 2) to 158 miles (Alt 4), and the No Action alternative (Alt 1). See associated maps.

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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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 ended April 4, 2016. On September 22, 2016, the Forest Service released the Final Supplemental EIS and Draft Record of Decision for the project. Those who have previously submitted comments on the project have standing to file objections during a 45-day objection period that begins September 23, 2016.

An objection resolution period follows the objection period, during which time Forest Service staff will meet with objectors in an attempt to find resolutions to their objection points. Following the resolution period, the Forest Service may choose to sign a final decision or modify the existing proposal.

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. As a direct result of public and stakeholder input, a number of changes were made from the original DEIS to the Supplemental DEIS, and now to the recently released Final Supplemental EIS. All comments submitted during the SDEIS comment period are included in the Final SEIS as an appendix, along with Forest Service responses to those comments.

What changes were made as a result of public input?

Throughout the planning process, forest planners have met with numerous groups and individuals to discuss the proposal. Here are some of the changes that resulted from those conversations:

- Abandoning specific routes in close proximity to private property, such as Mark's Creek and Crystal Springs Organization Camp
- Abandoning specific routes in close proximity to Corral Flat, where horse riding events are held every year
- Adding in trail segments to create loops, connect staging areas, and create better access and connectivity for users
- Realignment of trails to address hydrologic concerns, specifically within the Deep Creek watershed, such as reducing the number of stream crossings and rerouting a trail around the Crazy Creek enclosure
- Inclusion of increased riding opportunities for Class II OHVs (4x4s or Jeeps). Alternative 5 provides up to 7.8 miles of new trail in addition to 4.5 miles of riding opportunity on existing disturbances

How can I participate right now?

The public comment periods for this project are now over. For the past 7 years, the Forest Service has advertised the proposal and sought public feedback. Moving forward, there is still a need for public participation. The success of the project depends on volunteer efforts to help build and maintain the trail system and raise awareness about the rules and ethics of riding OHVs on public lands. Look for opportunities in the future to roll up your sleeves and help make this project a success.

How will this trail system impact 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.