

## Lemon Gulch Trail System Issue Paper

### Crook County Natural Resource Advisory Committee

Report to Crook County Court 9/14/2021

#### **Executive Summary**

At its meeting on September 8, 2021, the Crook County Natural Resource Advisory Committee (CCNRAC) listened to a report from its Lemon Gulch subcommittee along with comments and discussion from a group of 25 Crook County citizens who are among those most affected by this issue. Some are neighbors to the project area, others graze livestock under Forest Service permit within the area, and all are very concerned about impacts to their customs and culture from the proposed extensive trail system which is literally in their back yards. This was the fifth public meeting held by the CCNRAC to fully understand the issues and to provide Crook County citizens the opportunity to be fully heard. At the conclusion of this part of the meeting, Committee members were polled and voted unanimously to make the following recommendation to the County Court.

“CCNRAC recommends the County Court rescind its letter of support for the Lemon Gulch Project and to request that the Forest Service start their process for site selection and justification over again, with County assistance to reach a broader group of County Citizens to weigh in on the opportunities to expand all non-motorized trail opportunities, including biking, hiking and equestrian within the Ochoco National Forest.”

The Forest Service has done extensive outreach with trail user groups and others. However, CCNRAC believes that the people most impacted by the proposal, those who live and work there, were unaware of the project until only recently. An extensive system of trails has already been flagged on the ground before any decisions have been made. Now at this stage of the planning process, they are allowed only to comment on site specific considerations within the already prescribed area. At the Sept. 8 meeting, they requested to fully participate in considering “what area” of the Ochoco NF should receive the focus of this work, not simply “what to do” in the preselected area. CCNRAC agrees, believing it is better to back up now and resolve the issue rather than face the potential of continuing conflict and ill-will that might result from continuing on the current course.

#### **Background**

At the direction of the Crook County Court, the Crook County Natural Resources Committee has met 5 times to address landowner and grazing permittee concerns associated with the Lemon Gulch Bike Trail project being proposed (under current NEPA review) by the Ochoco National Forest. Lemon Gulch is found within the Mill Creek Watershed, approximately 15 miles from Prineville. The area is served by Mill Creek Road, a County road. Popular features of the Mill Creek Area include Steins Pillar, Brennan Palisades, Wildcat Campground and the Mill Creek Wilderness.

The proposal as announced by the Ochoco National Forest involves approximately 52 miles of non-motorized trails with primary use by mountain bikes but also open to hiking. The proposed trail system will occupy 9 square miles of the Lemon Gulch drainage. An organization, now known as Ochoco Trail Group was convened 3 – 4 years ago, in part by the Prineville/Crook County Chamber of Commerce to

address non-motorized trail issues in the Ochoco National Forest (bike and horse trail use conflicts on Lookout Mtn.). Over time, this group reviewed other trail opportunities across the Forest and provided recommendations to the Forest for future trail development. This group made presentations of their early work and mission to the Crook County Court and the Crook County Natural Resources Advisory Committee in the winter and spring of 2019. In August of 2019, this group recommended several areas of the National Forest to Forest administration for future trail work. The Forest, working with individuals from this group, developed several proposals including the Lemon Gulch area into an actual project. Scoping for the Lemon Gulch Trail System project was released in March, 2021 for a 30 day comment period.

With the release of the scoping letter, for the first time landowners within the Mill Creek watershed and Forest Service grazing permittees in the Lemon Gulch area learned about this proposal; unaware of the 2 plus years of work on this project by both the Forest Service and the Ochoco Trail Group. On April 13, 2021 during the County's work session, the Court approved a letter in support of the Lemon Gulch Project. At the County Court meeting of July 7<sup>th</sup>, members of the community expressed opposition to the Lemon Gulch Trail system expressing concerns about impacts on livestock grazing, wildlife, increased traffic on Mill Creek Road, trespass, weeds and other issues. This group expressed concern about the lack of Forest Service communication with them (the most affected parties) about the project and its impacts, and asked the Court to rescind their letter of support to the project. The Court said it would speak to its Natural Resources Committee before any decisions were made.

#### **Findings:**

- \* Five (5) public meetings were held by Crook County's Natural Resources Advisory Committee to discuss the history, processes and potential impacts of the Lemon Gulch Trail System (July 14, August 10, August 11, September 7 and 8. Landowners, permittees, Forest Service and trail advocates attended all meetings. Meeting minutes of this Committee can be reviewed for a summary of that conversation.
- \* The Forest Service and Trail advocates did hold a public meeting, October 2019, to discuss trail options and prioritize areas for development (place where Lemon Gulch was discussed and selected). There was no special attempt to contact landowners or grazing permittees within the Mill Creek watershed to discuss project outline, seek input and increase their awareness of the potential project.
- \* Following release of the Forest Service scoping letter (NEPA), permittees and landowners did meet with Forest Service administration in various formats (individually, group, etc) to express concern about the project impacts, "why here and why now?" and to express their frustration that they had not been aware of this project and should have been.
- \* The Committee heard overwhelming concern at its meetings about the lack of communication between the Forest and the people who live in the Mill Creek Watershed. This group of people feel that the only reason their voice was heard was because of the County and its Natural Resources Advisory Committee.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Crook County Natural Resources Advisory Committee,

Tim Deboodt  
Coordinator, Crook County Natural Resources Policy



## Crook County

Mailing: 300 NE 3<sup>rd</sup> Street • Prineville, Oregon 97754  
 Physical: 203 NE Court Street • Prineville, Oregon 97754  
 Phone (541) 416-6555

September 17, 2021

Juniper Canyon Water Control District

Prineville, OR 97754

Re: *Support of Relocation of Fairgrounds Industrial Water Rights Access*

Dear Board Members,

Each year the Fair Board, Ochoco Irrigation District and Crooked River Roundup struggle with arrangements to pump water from the OID ditch off Carey Foster Road. This water is used for dust control and the preparation for events like the Crooked River Roundup Rodeo and Horse Races, the annual Crook County Fair, and many other events held on the fairgrounds. Having access to water is extremely important. Currently, the water trucks are being driven on a public road (often by volunteers), and the water is being pulled from the irrigation canal. This is not the best use of this valuable resource, especially in times of drought. The relocation of the existing water access will allow these events to still produce high quality events in a more efficient and timely manner, as well as preserving the irrigation water for the farmers and ranchers.

Crook County and the Crook County Fair Board encourages you to support the relocation and construction of a new Check Dam on the Juniper Canyon Water Control canal. Your continued commitment to the fairgrounds is greatly appreciated.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this proposal and we look forward to working with you to provide the best for our community.

Sincerely,

County Commissioner and Fair Board