



Sisters Trails Alliance  
P.O. Box 1871  
Sisters, OR 97759

## *Trails for Everyone!*

22 September 2015

Mr. Alan Unger, Commissioner  
Deschutes Board of County Commissioners  
1300 NW Wall Street  
PO Box 6005  
Bend, OR 97703

Dear Mr. Unger,

When the Sisters Trails Alliance (STA) revised the Sisters Community Trails Plan in 2010, it identified a paved trail from Black Butte Ranch to Sisters as a priority. In 2011, it transferred roughly \$25,000 to the US Forest Service to carry out an environmental assessment (EA) of this and other trails. The STA worked closely with the Forest Service in 2012-13 to layout and refine the trail proposal. In 2014, the USFS issued a draft approval of the trail (alternative 3), which was subsequently withdrawn but with an invitation to the community to resubmit a trail proposal for a 2<sup>nd</sup> EA. Since that time, members of the STA, as well as the organization itself, have been working closely with the Friends of the Black Butte Trail to demonstrate strong community support for the trail, largely as initially approved by the Forest Service.

As should be evident from its long and extensive involvement in this process, the STA is a staunch supporter of this trail proposal. It would be quintessentially a “trail for everyone,” making accessibility to our forest a reality for anyone who wants it. It would create a new recreational amenity, complimenting and enhancing those that already make Sisters a destination for tourists and new residents – thus strengthening our local economy. It would create the only viable, enjoyable non-motorized commuting route among the most populated communities in Sisters Country. It would add to our community’s tools to encourage healthier lifestyles for persons of all ages and abilities. And it could become a linear classroom, to help teach environmental stewardship and forest ecology. Despite the apparent controversy over the trail from some parts of our community, no one has ever seriously disputed the benefits of this trail to our community.

On the basis of extensive evidence from other paved trails across the US, we firmly believe that the objections of some residents are based on fear, not fact. At the same time, we remain ready to work with the Forest Service to mitigate legitimate concerns, and to draw from various objections ideas that strengthen the proposal and will help build a better trail.

The STA has a Volunteer Service Agreement with the Forest Service to maintain about 100 miles of existing dirt trails, and we expect to sign a similar Agreement for routine maintenance of the Black Butte Trail once it is constructed. We recognize that this will be a major task, that will require us to mobilize new volunteers and additional financial resources, and we feel confident that we, and our community, can rise to that challenge.

Therefore, we urge you to submit this proposed trail (as defined largely by alternative 3 in the first EA) to the US Forest Service for a 2<sup>nd</sup> Environmental Assessment. We stand ready to work as collaboratively as possible with the Forest Service during the approval process, and we pledge to work as diligently as we can to make it a reality once it is approved.

Sincerely,

Charles Humphreys, Chair