



September 18, 2015

Alan Unger, Commissioner
Deschutes County Commission
1300 NW Wall Street
Bend, OR 97701

Dear Commissioner Unger:

An important part of the Juniper Group Sierra Club's mission is to preserve and protect the natural resources and beauty of Central and Eastern Oregon. The long-term sustainability and contribution to our region's ecology that forests make are central issues in our work.

We have examined the proposed paved Black Butte Trail that would link Black Butte Ranch to Sisters through the Deschutes National Forest. This trail would pass through a roaded natural area of the forest that has been heavily impacted by human activity over many decades—by fire, thinning and numerous trails, both legal and not. It has already been examined by the Forest Service, whose draft Environmental Assessment found it to be an acceptable use of the forest from both a scientific and a recreational point of view. The current proposal is careful to preserve old growth Ponderosa by using existing roads and to protect wetlands by using raised boardwalks. We understand it is also a recommended trail to increase non-motorized access to the Deschutes National Forest.

We also believe this trail could help us achieve our mission of ensuring the future of our forest resources. By making a small section of forest truly accessible to everyone, regardless of ability, it can help expose them to the function, beauty and fragility of our forests. We hope that by providing convenient, easy access the trail may help to reduce human impacts elsewhere in the surrounding forest. Along with appropriate interpretive signage and programs, the trail itself may provide the opportunity for an outdoor, living classroom to help teach forest stewardship, especially to children. We think this trail offers a sensible way of balancing pressure from thousands of nearby residents with conservation of an important natural resource.

The Juniper Group would like to join other environmental groups in supporting this proposed trail, and we encourage you to resubmit it to the Forest Service for a second Environmental Assessment that would confirm and potentially refine the findings of the first assessment. We urge you and the Commission to help move it forward as quickly as possible.

Respectfully,

Gretchen Valido, Chair
Juniper Group Sierra Club

Cc: Tammy Baney
Tony deBone