

# news



A DISCIPLES OF DIRT VOLUNTEER WORKS ON THE THURSTON HILLS MOUNTAIN BIKE TRAIL

PHOTO BY COLIN HOUCK

## Get Dirty

**DISCIPLES OF DIRT PLAN FILM FEST TO RAISE THE PROFILE OF MOUNTAIN BIKING AS A LOGGING CONTROVERSY GROWS**

By Colin Houck

**A**s Lane County mountain biking enthusiasts gear up for the 2019 Oregon outdoors season, local club Disciples of Dirt (DoD) is looking to generate some early excitement while area trails dry out, snow melts and a variety of planned maintenance projects are completed. At the same time, a local timber sale has potential benefits and pitfalls for cyclists and tree huggers.

DoD, in conjunction with Trails in Motion, an international trail-running and biking film tour organization, will host its first-ever screening of mountain biking-themed short films, Feb. 23, in support of their mission to support and grow opportunities for the sport in the Eugene-Springfield area.

DoD Board Chairman Lee Wilkinson describes the event as an opportunity for the local mountain biking community to come together in appreciation

and support of their shared passion, even if wintry conditions make for less than ideal riding. All proceeds from the event will go towards maintenance and expansion of existing trails as well as towards building new trail networks, he says.

Last year, DoD partnered with Springfield's Willamalane Park and Recreation District on a 1.5-mile section of single-track trail in the 665-acre Thurston Hills Natural Area. The trail has since proven extremely popular — so much so that DoD and Willamalane are again partnering to add up to five miles of trails to that project, with the hopes of having the new sections open within the year.

Additionally, DoD has been working with the Bureau of Land Management on a joint project to open nearly nine more miles of trails on federal land directly adjacent, and connecting to the Thurston Hills Natural Area. According to Wilkinson, if everything goes as planned, work on those trails could begin as soon as 2021.

As *Eugene Weekly* reported last summer, the proposed project, which many had hoped would be a trail system in undisturbed forest, quickly became mired in controversy as BLM announced plans to log the area via a proposed timber sale. Dubbed the “Pedal Power” sale, at the time BLM’s plan was to clearcut 155 acres of mature forest, much of which the trail system would run through.

On Tuesday, Feb. 19, Oregon Wild and Cascadia Wildlands filed a lawsuit in U.S. District Court in Eugene challenging the BLM plan, citing increased fire hazards and threats to recreation from the proposed logging.

Leading up to the lawsuit, community members and

stakeholders had voiced considerable opposition to the BLM plan, with Rep. Peter DeFazio and state Sen. Lee Beyer weighing-in, and DeFazio penning a strongly-worded letter against the plan.

At the time, BLM acting field director Michael Kinsey said that while the agency would continue to hold dialogue with partners and community members, for all intents and purposes, the decision was final.

The sale was ultimately approved, albeit at a much-reduced scale.

On Feb. 11, Seneca Jones Timber Company announced in a press release that it had been awarded the Pedal Power contract, but that the original plan to clear-cut 155 acres has been amended to just 92 total acres to be spread out in patches throughout the 394-acre project area.

While DoD is pleased with the outcome of the process, others are less enthusiastic. As it did then, Oregon Wild maintains that BLM’s plan is shortsighted, and that it remains disappointed that BLM never considered thinning — a far less intrusive approach — as an option.

For DoD’s part, Wilkinson says that the group’s goal is to provide as much opportunity to Oregon mountain bikers as possible, and the group is excited to continue to work with its partners and community members in service of that goal. ■

*The film screening is 6-10 pm Feb. 23 at 400 International Way, Suite 120, Springfield. The films include Outlaw Diaries II, Fall Impressions, Tour of Ara, High Altitude Lines, Beyond the Bike, Chasing Wild and Huayhuash.*

*In addition to the film screening, organizers say the DoD/ Trails in Motion event will feature a silent auction, a raffle, pizza provided by A Wheel Apizza and a selection of local microbrews. Elevate Kombucha will be providing non-alcoholic beverages. Tickets are \$15-25.*