

Oregon News

Judge rejects Forest Service plan for OHV trails in Ochoco National Forest

■ Federal magistrate Patricia Sullivan cites possible effects on elk and gray wolves

By Stephen Hamway
WesCom News Service

A controversial proposal to establish a network of trails for off-highway motorized vehicles in the Ochoco National Forest is in jeopardy, after a federal judge in Pendleton recommended that the project be rejected.

Earlier this week, United States Magistrate Judge Patricia Sullivan rejected the U.S. Forest Service’s proposal in a preliminary ruling. In her decision, Sullivan noted that the Ochoco Summit Trail System Project, which would provide a 137-mile network of trails that could be used by ATVs and other motorized vehicles, did not properly account for the needs of vulnerable species, including elk and gray wolves.

“Here, the Forest Service committed multiple substantive errors, as to multiple statutes, regulations, and rules,” the decision reads.

While the decision is preliminary, acting as a recommendation that could be upheld, denied or altered by a U.S. District Court judge, conservation groups and other organizations in opposition to the trails proposal are celebrating.

Sarah Cuddy, Ochoco Mountains coordinator for

“It’s a win for the Ochocos. It’s the biggest and toughest hurdle to overcome.”

— Sarah Cuddy, Oregon Wild

the environmental group Oregon Wild, said the comprehensive nature of the decision makes it unlikely it would be rejected entirely. “It’s a win for the Ochocos,” Cuddy said. “It’s the biggest and toughest hurdle to overcome.”

The Forest Service has been looking at options for an expanded trail system within the Ochoco National Forest for more than a decade. Jill Welborn, acting public affairs officer for the national forest, said the forest has seen a lot of use from off-highway vehicles in recent years, much of which takes place on user-created trails that can damage native vegetation, disrupt habitat and harm stream beds. The goal of the proposal, Welborn said, was to create a way for OHV riders to use the forest without damaging it.

Cuddy and other environmentalists felt the proposal selected by the Forest Service doesn’t fix those problems. After the agency released a final environmental impact

statement in 2016, which called for a mix of new trails and existing Forest Service roads to be converted into a trail system, hunters, conservationists and other groups criticized the proposal as being harmful to a range of animals living in the forest. Cuddy said the groups went into conflict resolution to solve the issues. However, when the Forest Service approved the plan last June, conservationists, hunting organizations and other groups sued.

In her decision, Sullivan notes that she didn’t believe the Forest Service did enough to mitigate impacts to the Ochoco National Forest’s elk populations, something the Ochoco National Forest has prioritized in its forest management plan.

Greg Jackle, wildlife biologist for the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife’s Prineville district, said elk are particularly sensitive to noise, and the sounds from motorized vehicles can cause elk to scatter and abandon valuable habitat, even during their calving season.

“It’s not ideal when they’re trying to raise a calf or put on fat for the winter,” Jackle said.

More than 4,100 elk were confirmed to be living in the

section of the forest in 2017, fewer than the agency’s goal of 4,500 animals in the area. In part because of that, Jackle said he had concerns about adding another nuisance that could drive elk out of the national forest.

Because the proposed trails would traverse elk rutting and calving areas, Sullivan ruled that the proposal violates requirements in the forest plan.

Additionally, the decision notes that the Forest Service has failed to comply with its standards for road density throughout the forest, which requires that roads and trails “be at the lowest density which meets long-term resource needs.” Cuddy added that the Forest Service failed to account for closed roads that are still used by drivers, cyclists and trail-riders.

“The way they conducted their analysis isn’t consistent with what’s happening on the ground,” Cuddy said.

Sullivan also wrote that the Forest Service violated the federal Endangered Species Act by determining the project area wouldn’t impact gray wolf populations, and failing to consult with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

See **OHV Trails** / Page 7A

Hunter rescued

LA GRANDE (AP) — An Oregon hunter who fell out of his tree stand and got tangled in his safety harness was rescued Tuesday after hanging upside-down for two days about 30 feet from the ground.

The Union County Sheriff’s Department said another hunter found the man and drove to a nearby highway to get cellphone reception to call 911. Rescuers used a bucket truck and ladder to reach him.

The (La Grande) Observer reports that the man’s heart stopped beating about halfway through the rescue because blood flow that had been cut off to his lower body was suddenly restored. Rescuers were prepared for that possibility and had established a landing zone for a helicopter to airlift him to a local hospital.

COUNTY

Continued from Page 1A

The bridge is closed with a locked barricade and has been closed to the public since 2011. If commissioners want the bridge to be opened for public use, the county would need to make structural improvements. And that would require the county to get approval from the Forest Service.

Commission Chairman Bill Harvey said multiple times that in the process of trying to upgrade and replace the bridge the county would not give up its rights.

There are two possible ways that the Forest Service could approve changes to the bridge. The county could apply for an easement, which would require an analysis through the National Environmental Policy Act and would be a long-term solution.

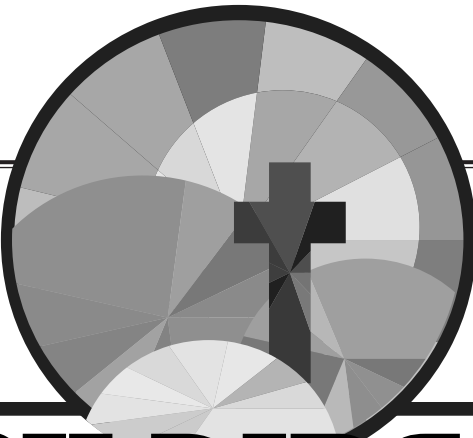
The other option is a shared maintenance agreement, which is a more short-term solution to the issues with the bridge. The county is looking at both options.

Wednesday’s meeting began with an executive session regarding the county’s efforts to gain public access to a section of the Connor Creek Road near Lookout Mountain.

A property owner, Todd Longgood, installed a locked gate last year near where the road meets the Daly Creek Road north of Lookout Mountain.

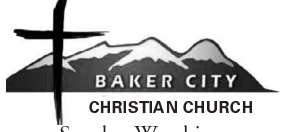
After the executive session the commissioners said they are trying to resolve the situation without litigation and ensure that the public has access to the area, potentially by way of a different road that would need to be improved to be usable.

Harvey said the county intends to resolve the situation permanently so that there are not future issues regarding public access in the area. That alternative route would avoid the section of the Connor Creek Road that passes through Longgood’s property.



Baker County

CHURCH DIRECTORY

Baker United Methodist Church Sunday Worship Casual Service: 8:30 AM Traditional Service: 10 AM 1919 2nd Street, Baker City 541-523-4201	FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH Sunday Worship Service 10:30 AM 1995 4th Street, Baker City 541-523-5201 firstpresbaker.blogspot.com	 Calvary Baptist Church Third & Broadway 541-523-3891 Sundays 10 AM Service 8:30 AM Sunday School 6-8 pm Youth Group (Grades 7-12) Thursdays 5:30-6:30 pm Free Community Dinner 6:30-8pm Family Date Night www.bakercalvarybaptist.com	CHRISTIAN SCIENCE CHURCH Sunday Service 11:00 AM <i>www.spirituality.com</i> 3rd & Washington, Baker City 541-523-5911	 CHURCH OF THE NAZARENE Sunday Worship 9:45 AM Pastor Troy Teeter 1250 Hughes Lane, Baker City (Corner of Cedar & Hughes) 541-523-3533 www.bakernaz.com	THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS Baker City 1st Ward Sacrament Meeting 1 PM Baker City 2nd Ward Sacrament Meeting 9 AM Baker Valley Ward Sacrament Meeting 11 AM 2625 Hughes Lane, Baker City 541-523-2397
 Elkhorn Baptist Church Sunday School 10 AM Morning Worship 11 AM Evening Worship 6 PM Discovery Kids Worship 6:30 PM 3520 Birch St, Baker City 541-523-4332	 Harvest Church & HARVEST CHRISTIAN ACADEMY (Preschool-12 Grade) Harvest Cafe 9:15 am Morning Worship 10:10 AM 3720 Birch St, Baker City 541-523-4233 <i>The first Sunday of each month is Mission Breakfast. Donations and non-perishable donations for NEOCC are accepted.</i>	New Beginnings Fellowship PC of G Sunday Morning Worship 10:30 AM Sunday Evening 6 PM Weds Service 7 PM Zan & Dawn Coen 1820 Estes, Baker City 541- 524-1394	FIRST LUTHERAN CHURCH Sunday Service 10 AM 1734 Third Street, Baker City 541-523-3922 firstlutheranbakercity@gmail.com	ST. BRIGID'S IN THE PINES COMMUNITY CHURCH 11:30 a.m. Services 1st & 3rd Sunday Holy Eucharist East Auburn Street, Sumpter 541-523-4812 <i>A Mission of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Baker City</i>	 BAKER CITY CHRISTIAN CHURCH Sunday Worship First Service 9 AM 2nd Service & Sunday School 10:45 AM Jr. High & High School Youth Tues 6:30 PM Youth Pastor Silas Moe 675 Hwy 7, Baker City • 541-523-5425
SAINT ALPHONSUS HOSPITAL CHAPEL <i>Open to all patients, family and friends for reflection and prayer.</i> St. Alphonsus Hospital in Baker City	AGAPE CHRISTIAN CENTER <u>Sunday Services</u> 10:00 AM & 6:30 PM South Highway 7, Baker City 541-523-6586	SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH Saturday Worship 11:00 AM www.bakercitysda.com 17th & Pocahontas, Baker City 541-523-4913	 St. Francis De Sales Cathedral Daily Masses at 9 AM at the Cathedral Established 1904 Baker City Saturday Mass 6 pm Sunday Mass 9:30 am Spanish Mass 1:30 pm (2nd & 4th Sun) St. Therese in Halfway 2 pm Sat St. Anthony's in North Powder 1:30 Sun 541-523-4521 Corner of First & Church, Baker City	 St. Stephen's Episcopal <u>Services at 9 AM</u> 1st & 3rd Sundays, Holy Eucharist 2nd & 4th Sundays, Morning Prayer 5th Sunday, Morning Prayer 2177 First Street • Baker City Entrance on 1st Street Corner Church & First Streets 541-523-4812	Faith Center Foursquare <i>A Four Square Gospel Church</i> Worship Service 10:45 AM 1839 3rd St, Baker City 541-523-7915

The church directory is published the last Friday of every month. Information for this directory is provided by participating churches, please call 541-523-3673 for more information.

Thank you to the participating churches and these sponsors:

Whelan Electric, Inc.
523-5756 • CCB 103032

Cliff's Saws & Cycles
2619 Tenth • 523-2412

**GRAY'S WEST & CO.**
1500 Dewey • 523-3677

**Coles Tribute Center**
1950 Place • 523-4300

