

News from the Oregon Hunters Association

August 28, 2018

OHA prevails in recommended ruling on Ochoco National Forest OHV trail lawsuit; Pendleton Judge sides with OHA to protect key elk habitat.

A Magistrate Judge this week sided with the Oregon Hunters Association (OHA) and other groups who filed suit to stop the U.S. Forest Service from building an additional 137 miles of off highway vehicle (OHV) trails in critical elk habitat on the Ochoco National Forest.

OHA, a nonprofit group of more than 10,000 hunters, filed a lawsuit in 2017 challenging the Record of Decision by Forest Service to implement the project. Magistrate Judge Patricia Sullivan in Pendleton on Monday, Aug. 27, issued her Findings and Recommendations in the case, which ruled for OHA on four of the five claims made against the project.

Finding that the Forest Service made an "arbitrary and capricious" decision to approve the project, she recommended that the Record of Decision be set aside. The judge's finding essentially would kill the project unless the Forest Service goes back to the drawing board. A final ruling is expected in the next few months.

OHA's claims that the project violated road density standards in the Ochoco National Forest Plan and didn't adequately address protection for elk during calving and rutting seasons prevailed.

Jim Akenson, OHA's conservation director, was pleased with the recommended decision.

"We fought for elk, and won," said Akenson.

"OHA did everything they could to participate in the Forest Service planning process and raise their concerns about impacts on elk security and habitat," added Paul Donheffner, OHA's Legislative Director. "We filed this lawsuit as a last resort. This was a very good day for OHA, other conservation groups that value the Ochocos, and for elk. Prevailing against the federal government is no easy match. This is a great victory for OHA and our mission."

The Ochoco Mountains have historically been some of the best habitat for deer and elk in Oregon. Information published on ODFW's website reveals that hunting contributes more than \$14 million to central Oregon's tourism economy and more than \$104 million to the statewide tourism economy on an annual basis.

OHA (oregonhunters.org) is the state's largest Oregon-based pro-hunting organization, with 10,000 members and 26 chapters statewide. Its mission is "Protecting Oregon's wildlife, habitat and hunting heritage."