

ACCESS FUND ◆ ALPINE LAKES PROTECTION SOCIETY ◆ CONSERVATION NORTHWEST ◆
FRIENDS OF HEYBROOK RIDGE ◆ FRIENDS OF WILD SKY ◆ NORTH CASCADES CONSERVATION COUNCIL
PILCHUCK AUDUBON SOCIETY ◆ SIERRA CLUB – WASHINGTON CHAPTER ◆ THE MOUNTAINEERS ◆
THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY ◆ WASHINGTON CLIMBERS COALITION ◆ WASHINGTON TRAILS ASSOCIATION
◆ WASHINGTON WILD ◆

September 30, 2014

Joseph Neal
Skykomish District Ranger
74920 N.E. Stevens Pass Highway
P.O. Box 305
Skykomish, WA 98288

RE: Joint Comments on Frog Mt. and Alpine Falls Trail Projects Scoping Letter

Dear District Ranger Neal:

The undersigned conservation and recreation organizations are writing to express our strong support for the development and construction of the Frog Mountain and Alpine Falls Alpine Baldy trails as proposed by the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest.

Many of our organizations invested nearly a decade of effort and support to protect mature and old-growth forests and salmon spawning streams as part of the Wild Sky Wilderness. In 2008, Congress designated 106,000 acres in the North Fork Skykomish and Beckler River Valleys as federal Wilderness. This successful campaign was a result of a concerted effort to reach out early and often to local stakeholders and user groups to listen and address their concerns to make a better more balanced proposal.

A major reason our organizations work so hard to protect places as Wilderness or Wild and Scenic Rivers is so that current and future generations can enjoy these places. Located along the Highway 2 corridor less than 90 minutes from 2.5 million residents in the Puget Sound region, recreation was a key focus of the Wild Sky designation. As a part of the Wild Sky legislation, a trail study was included to look at hiking, equestrian and mountain biking opportunities both inside the designated Wilderness and within the broader Skykomish Ranger District. We are happy to see that the Frog Mountain and Alpine Falls trails are now being developed.

We strongly support both the Frog Mountain and Alpine Falls trail proposals. Both are well chosen and well-sited to meet the ever growing demand for outdoor recreation in areas close to the Greater Seattle area, and along the Highway 2 corridor in particular.

Frog Mountain is well placed to provide a moderate climb of about 2,300 feet elevation gain. The destination is a big, broad and attractive summit with expansive views in most directions. The grass/forb meadows near the summit will also add to the attractiveness of the destination. The access from main trunk Road 65 would provide a good, durable road that is passable by most types of vehicles, including passenger cars. A trailhead at Jack Pass can provide ample parking for trail users. A trail to the top of Frog Mountain will intrude only minimally on "core security habitat" for wildlife such as bears, wolverines and other wide ranging fauna. The length and elevation gain of the proposed trail at Frog Mountain are well chosen in terms of suitability for hikers of varying physical abilities. It will be long enough and high enough to give a feeling of accomplishment to most visitors, but not unduly difficult, and well within the capabilities of most day hikers. It will be very similar to the difficulty level of the Beckler Peak Trail, which has proven very popular.

We also support the Alpine Falls viewpoint and the short trail proposal. Alpine Falls marks the upper end of anadromous fish accessible waters in the Tye River. Some years ago it was very visible from Highway 2 but today few people are even aware it exists. The trail and viewpoint as proposed will be a valuable roadside attraction and addition to the Scenic Byway as an ADA accessible trail.

We noticed that the scoping letter referenced the use of some retaining walls using treated timber. Consideration should be given to the tradeoffs between the durability of using treated timber and the potential impacts to trail builders and potential of related chemicals leaching into nearby water bodies. A 2006 technical services report entitled "Preservative-Treated Wood and Alternative Products in the Forest Service" by Groenier and Lebow of the U.S. Forest Service's Forest Products Laboratory in Missoula, MT is a useful resource for guidance. The report suggests that site selection for using treated timber is important including staying away from surface water and minimizing placement in sensitive areas and over water.

The need to provide for more outdoor recreational opportunities in places close to the Seattle metropolitan area is critical. Many of the more accessible trails can be extremely crowded on peak weekend days. More trails are needed to ensure that National Forest visitors can have an enjoyable experience on these public lands we all own. For these reasons we also support these trail proposals.

Many of our organizations have been involved and support efforts to develop a shared vision to enhance economic development, increase recreation opportunities and conserve the natural resources in the Skykomish Valley. Rural towns in many areas of the country have found that proximity to quality recreational trails and activities can promote economic development, increase business opportunities and enhance local quality of life.

The Town of Skykomish, Stevens Pass Greenway and other stakeholders along the Highway 2 corridor have been working to protect and preserve the valuable open space, habitat and some of the last unprotected old growth forest in King County, while fostering economic development by offering opportunities for recreation on local trails, along the river and throughout the valley. This project complements these ongoing efforts.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.

Sincerely,

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