

**The Access Fund · The American Alpine Club · American Whitewater  
Back Country Horsemen of Washington · Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance  
The Mountaineers · Washington Climbers Coalition  
Washington Trails Association · Washington Wild · The Wilderness Society**

April 19, 2012

Keith Wong, Project Manager  
Federal Highway Administration  
Western Federal Lands Division  
610 East Fifth Street  
Vancouver, WA 98661-3893

Re: Suiattle River Road Project Environmental Assessment (EA)

Dear Mr. Wong,

The undersigned organizations take a keen interest in issues that affect trailhead, river, and wilderness access on our public lands in Washington State. Our members are hikers, climbers, equestrians, mountain bikers, and paddlers statewide and view the Suiattle River Road as an important portal to the Glacier Peak Wilderness that has been inaccessible for far too long. We are pleased to see the recently published Environmental Assessment concerning repair of the Suiattle River Road. Our organizations strongly support Alternative B.

Forest Road #26 is an important recreational access asset for the public and the Forest Service. It provides access to seven trailheads, two campgrounds, 27.4 miles of the Wild and Scenic Suiattle River, and tens of thousands of acres of forest that provide countless recreational opportunities for all ages. More than 120 miles of trail is accessible via the seven trailheads along the road; 113 miles (93 percent) of these trails are within the Glacier Peak Wilderness area. Together with the loss of the White Chuck River Road, the washouts on the Suiattle have rendered the west side of the Glacier Peak Wilderness and the upper reaches of the Suiattle River out of reach for many of our constituents. For nearly a decade, trail users have missed out on easy access to the meadows of Green Mountain, majestic views of Image Lake, and wonders of the Pacific Crest Trail.

Important conservation and recreation access priorities intersect on the Suiattle. As a Wild and Scenic River, its outstandingly remarkable values and free-flowing nature are protected. At several locations, Alternative B will enhance the wildlife, fish, and scenic outstanding remarkable values that led to the Suiattle's designation, by moving the road upslope and reconnecting the river with its wetlands and historical channel. The Downey Creek bridge extension and embankment removal has enormous potential to improve fish passage and give Downey Creek room to migrate across the floodplain in a more natural fashion.

We note that a recognized need exists for river access in the vicinity of Downey Creek. In the past rafters and kayakers accessed the river by sliding boats down the steep bank at the Downey Creek Trailhead. Evaluating opportunities to identify a usable put-in associated with the Downey Creek Bridge repairs would fulfill an existing need, be consistent with recreation goals in the Wild and Scenic River management plan, and reduce erosion and safety issues associated with the historic access at the Downey Creek Trailhead.

Our organizations value access to our public lands while working to protect them for future generations. We support repair and enhancement of important access roads like the Suiattle Road. At the same time we also support decommissioning those Forest Service roads that do not provide planned recreational access, but carry high aquatic risks to our watersheds and hold excessive maintenance costs for the American taxpayer. As members of the Washington Watershed Restoration Initiative, most of our organizations have worked to advocate for federal funding to address these legacy roads and water quality issues through strategic repairs, storm-proofing and decommissioning.

The recreational purpose served by the Suiattle distinguishes it from the many miles of spur roads that sprawl across the forest landscape, the decommissioning of which we have actively supported. Many of these spurs have been dealt with admirably through the recently signed Suiattle Access and Travel Management (ATM) Plan.

Thank you for the hard work you have clearly put into the Suiattle EA. Please do not hesitate to contact Jonathan Guzzo at Washington Trails Association if you have questions or are in need of assistance. He can be reached at 206.965.8558 or by email at [jonathan@wta.org](mailto:jonathan@wta.org).

Sincerely,

**Jason Keith**  
**Senior Policy Advisor**  
**The Access Fund**

**Leigh Goldberg**  
**Conservation and Advocacy Director**  
**The American Alpine Club**

**Thomas O'Keefe, Ph.D.**  
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