

Addressed Issues

Alpine Lakes Wilderness Additions & Pratt and Middle Fork Snoqualmie Rivers Protection Act (H.R. 361; S. 112)

In 2007, Congressman Dave Reichert (R-WA08) began working with the state wilderness community to develop wilderness legislation for the Middle Fork and South Fork Snoqualmie River Valleys in the 8th Congressional district. Following the model set by Wild Sky, significant effort was focused on reaching out to local stakeholders and addressing individual issues early on, prior to introduction of legislation. In 2009, Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) began working with Congressman Reichert leading to a joint House and Senate introduction of an expanded bill which included a wild and scenic designation for the Middle Fork Snoqualmie River (H.R. 608 and S. 322). In January, the same bill was reintroduced by Senator Murray and Congressman Dave Reichert and Congresswoman Suzan DelBene (D-WA01) into the 113th Congress.

The list below highlights consultations with local residents, affected landowners, as well as various user-groups which were a critical part of shaping a carefully crafted and balanced bill. Here are some adjustments and modifications that address the spectrum of concerns:

Mountain Bike Use on the Middle Fork Trail

Knowing that the Middle Fork trail is popular with mountain bikers, members of the Alpine Lakes Additions Working Group reached out to the Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance, the largest statewide mountain bike association to discuss potential wilderness additions concept. Under an agreement reached in the past several years, mountain bikes have used the 13-mile trail along the Middle Fork Snoqualmie River every other day (odd numbered days) – alternating with equestrian and hiking use. However, as a mechanized use, the 1964 Wilderness Act does not permit mountain biking. After consultations between local mountain bikers, wilderness advocates and hiking enthusiasts, an agreement was reached. The Middle Fork Trail was excluded from the proposed wilderness additions boundary in order to allow the current every other day seasonal use to continue. Importantly, the Wild and Scenic River designation does include protections for the corridor along the river where the trail lies. This ensures that the wild experience that the mountain bikers value will persist into the future. As a result, Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance and the International Mountain Bicycle Alliance both support the Alpine Lakes Wilderness Additions & Pratt and Middle Fork Snoqualmie Rivers Protection Act.

King County Search & Rescue Landing Site in the Pratt Valley

King County Search & Rescue indicated the presence of an undocumented helicopter landing site on Forest Service land near the confluence of the Pratt and Middle Fork Snoqualmie Rivers within the proposal. This site is intended to help with King County's obligations to provide search and rescue operations in this part of the Cascades. The boundary of the proposal was adjusted to exclude the site entirely.

Avalanche Threats in the I-90 corridor

The State Department of Transportation maintains Interstate 90, which parallels the South Fork Snoqualmie River and runs nearby the proposed wilderness additions. After consulting with the agency about their obligation to ensure the health and safety of the interstate corridor, an adjusted proposal boundary was developed. In particular, the boundary was placed sufficiently up hill (at least 800 horizontal feet from the interstate corridor) to accommodate avalanche prevention activities above specific stretches of the road by excluding those areas from the proposed Wilderness.

Ski Area Operations near Snoqualmie Pass

The Alpentel Ski Area, a division of the Summit at Snoqualmie, operates a world-class ski area on Forest Service land through a special use permit. After consultation with the ski area manager, the proposal boundaries were drawn to exclude the entire special use permit area (on Forest Service land) so as to avoid any unanticipated potential impacts now or in the future.

I-90 Thin Sale & Existing Rock Quarry in the South Fork Snoqualmie Valley

The Forest Service expressed concerns about the potential impact of the proposed wilderness additions on a timber sale (the I-90 thinning proposal), located in the immediate vicinity of the proposed wilderness additions. Following consultation with the Forest Service, the wilderness additions proposal boundary was drawn to exclude these activities and sites. The merits of this proposed sale were decided through an environmental assessment, separate from this proposal. The work on this sale is expected to be completed in 2013. Additionally, two existing rock quarries on Forest Service land in the South Fork section of the proposal have been excluded from the wilderness additions boundary.

Private Hot Springs Near Burnt Boot Creek

The nonprofit organization Northwest Wilderness Programs (NWWP) operates the Goldmyer Hot Springs on land it owns in the upper Middle Fork Valley. The Hot Springs are accessed by hiking and biking trails. NWWP Board of Directors were consulted a number of times early in the development of the proposal. As a result of their input, specific adjustments to the proposed wilderness boundary were made in the final legislation including:

- 200-foot buffer surrounding the property to address concerns about mechanized management of tree falls onto the property from adjacent wilderness lands
- Setbacks (80 ft vertical feet minimum) on trails accessing the property from the proposed wilderness boundary to allow for trail relocation due to river channel movements or related events.
- The proposed wilderness boundaries are based on a 2007 Forest Service field survey to ensure that it accurately reflects the location of the current trail corridor.

Private Donation of Cave Ridge Parcel

The Cave Ridge parcel (about 120 acres) near Guye Peak was added to the existing Alpine Lakes Wilderness as a donation per Section 6 of the Wilderness Act (Public Law 88-577). There is an agreement to donate this parcel to the Forest Service as part of a negotiated settlement regarding the expansion of the Summit at Snoqualmie Ski Area. The portion of this parcel depicted as Wilderness on the proposal map will be donated as an addition to the existing Wilderness per Section 6 of the Wilderness Act once this act is signed into law. Section 6 allows the Secretary of Agriculture to accept donated parcels of lands adjacent to a designated wilderness area. Once acquired and after giving 60 days notice to Congress the parcel can be added to the wilderness boundary with no further action.

State Department of Natural Resources

Between the Middle Fork and South Fork Snoqualmie Rivers, political agency boundaries between U.S. Forest Service and Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) management do not follow any ecological or watershed-based features on the ground. In one case, Thompson Lake is literally split between the two management agencies. To that end, two small parcels (Thompson Lake and Russian Butte - a combined 320 acres) of Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) lands have been included within the proposed Wilderness boundary. DNR has acquired most of private lands in the lower Middle Fork Snoqualmie valley, consolidating public ownership in the valley and in 2011 established these parcels and surrounding state lands as part of the Middle Fork Snoqualmie Natural Resources Conservation Area. DNR is supportive of the noted parcels being added to the Wilderness if and when they are acquired by the Forest Service but there is no schedule for the acquisition of the two parcels, described above.

Road & Trailhead Access

Recreation is a key draw for this part of the Cascades because of its proximity to the Greater Seattle and Bellevue metropolitan areas. The wilderness proposal deliberately excluded any Forest Service system roads and therefore has no impact on current road access or maintenance. Furthermore, the proposed wilderness boundary does not include any existing trailheads, preserving the same parking and trailhead access to the popular hikes in this area. The ongoing effort to enhance the Middle Fork Road, which has cleared its NEPA process and has federal funding would, and will, be consistent with the legislation.