



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie
National Forest
Darrington Ranger District

1405 Emens Street
Darrington, WA 98241
(360) 436-1155

File Code: 1950
Date: June 11, 2018

Subject: Proposed U.S. Geological Survey flights and sampling in Glacier Peak Wilderness 2018-2022

Dear Forest User:

The U.S. Geological Survey Cascades Volcano Observatory (USGS) is proposing to use a helicopter to deliver and pick up equipment, tools, supplies, and geologic samples within the Glacier Peak Wilderness, commencing in the summer of 2018 and continuing through 2022.

The 2018 helicopter mission is to facilitate replacing batteries and repairing USGS's sole seismic monitoring station "Glacier Peak West" (GPW, refer to map), which is only functioning intermittently and will likely cease operating entirely within a few months without new batteries. Servicing the seismometer is expected to keep it fully operational for the next 3 to 5 years. New batteries and other equipment weighing 350 pounds would be delivered in one sling load; one trip to deliver during the second week of August, and one trip to remove the used batteries and equipment approximately two weeks later. Within the same sling load, geologic sampling supplies, tools and mountaineering hardware would be delivered to support the USGS's ongoing collection of geologic samples from the upper west flank and summit of Glacier Peak (authorized by permit through 2018). The geologic samples would be flown out in the same sling load, along with the spent batteries, hardware, and supplies. The Green Mountain pasture up the Suiattle River valley would be used as a helibase for the mission. The helicopter would not land at the GPW location. Flights would not occur on weekends. The maintenance/mapping crew members would hike in to the GPW location to detach and hook up the cargo nets during the sling operations, make repairs to the seismic station and conduct the sampling, then hike out.

For years 2019 through 2022, the USGS proposes to continue drilling and gathering core samples with a powered, hand-held drill, and map the more remote areas of Glacier Peak, on the upper east flanks of the mountain. The purpose of sampling and mapping the deposits is to characterize the eruptive history of the volcano. This is an ongoing research study that the Forest Service permitted for 2016-2018, and would need to reauthorize for 2019-2022. As there are logistical challenges and safety concerns of packing in 200 or more pounds of equipment and mountaineering gear into remote areas that cannot be safely traversed by stock animals or people burdened with the gear, the USGS is requesting to use a helicopter to deliver and pick up the equipment and supplies (one trip to deliver and one trip to pick up, per year). The sampling/mapping crew would hike in to the sampling locations to assist with the sling loads, obtain the samples, and hike out. The helicopter would be staged at the Green Mountain horse pasture, and would not land at the sampling sites or fly on weekends. Typically the flights and sampling would occur during the month of August.

The Forest Supervisor is the responsible official who will decide on authorizing the use of a helicopter and other motorized tools in Wilderness, to facilitate the USGS's maintenance of the seismic station and conduct sampling research in order to gain a better understanding of Glacier Peak's frequency of eruptions. The Forest Service plans to categorically exclude these proposed actions from documentation in an Environmental Assessment or Environmental Impact Statement, pursuant to 36 CFR 220.6(d)(8) and 7 CFR 1b (a)(3). The estimated decision dates are July 15, 2018 for the 2018 flight, and June 15, 2019 for the 2019-2022 flights and special use permit.



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How to Comment:

Electronic comments are preferred and should be submitted with the following subject line, "Proposed U.S. Geological Survey flights and sampling in Glacier Peak Wilderness 2018-2022", and as part of the actual email message, or in another readable format such as plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), .pdf, or Word (.doc or .docx) to: comments-pacificnorthwest-mtbaker-snoqualmie-darrington@fs.fed.us.

Written comments should be mailed or dropped off in person to:

Peter R. Forbes, District Ranger
Darrington Ranger District
1405 Emens Avenue N.
Darrington, WA 98241

Office hours for submitting hand-delivered comments are 8:00 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Your comments would be most helpful if received within 30 days of receiving this letter. Comments received, including names and addresses of those who comment, will become part of the Project Record and available for public review.

If you have any questions or have any concerns about this proposal, please contact the Forest Service's project lead Eric Ozog at 360-691-4396 (email, eozag@fs.fed.us). Thank you for your time, we appreciate your continued interest in management of the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest.

Sincerely,



PETER R. FORBES
District Ranger

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the public record on the proposed action and will be available for public inspection. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have standing for pre-decisional objections as provided for in 36 CFR 218. Additionally, pursuant to 7 CFR 1.27(d), any person may request the agency to withhold a submission from the public record by showing how the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) permits such confidentiality. Persons requesting such confidentiality should be aware that, under the FOIA, confidentiality may be granted in only very limited circumstances, such as to protect trade secrets. The Forest Service will inform the requester of the agency's decision regarding the request for confidentiality, and where the request is denied, the agency will return the submission and notify the requester that the comments may be resubmitted with or without name and address within 14 days.

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U.S. DEPARTMENT
MT. BAKER RANGE
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SEDRO WOOLLEY, WA 98284

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A photograph of a US postage stamp featuring a portrait of George Washington. The stamp is addressed to "Seattle, Seattle, WA" and has a postmark from "WED 23 JULY 2018 PM".

Gary MacFarlane
Wilderness Watch
PO Box 9175
Missoula, MT 59807