

May 21, 2020

Gifford Pinchot Forest Supervisor
987 McClellan Road
Vancouver, WA 98661

Subject: Spirit Lake Tunnel Intake Gate Replacement and Geotechnical Drilling Project
#57259

Dear Gifford Pinchot Forest Supervisor and Monument Ranger Hoffman:

I am writing this letter as a formal objection, to oppose all proposed actions for the Spirit Lake Tunnel Intake Gate Replacement and Geotechnical Drilling Project #57259.

I am an aquatic ecologist with nearly twenty years of research experience; I currently hold research scientist positions at both the Science Museum of Minnesota and the Evergreen State College. I have been collaborating with Dr. Carri LeRoy (The Evergreen State College) and USFS scientists to study the streams on the Pumice Plain of Mount St. Helens since 2017. We have an active \$225,000 National Science Foundation grant to do research at MSHNVM through 2021.

The proposed road-building actions will negatively impact our ability to carry out our funded research and will significantly alter the course of successional development for the streams on the Pumice Plain. **I strongly object to the current plan due to the lack of consideration or serious analysis of the impact of the proposed actions on both freshwater and terrestrial systems and on the value of ongoing research.**

The streams on the Pumice Plain comprise some of the youngest watersheds on Earth. Five entire watersheds were formed following the eruption of 1980, and each consists of several tributaries. The entire watersheds are contained within the sensitive area of MSHNVM on the Pumice Plain. On the Pumice Plain, we not only have streams that are very young (less than 40 years old), but there are replicate streams = 5 small streams carving through the same unconsolidated pyroclastic and pumice material, flowing from springs that start on the mountainside and flow into Spirit Lake. There is not another location on Earth with this experimental set-up, and this is the reason the National Science Foundation has invested in this research – for its unique nature and the information we can gather at this specific site. Our preliminary research shows that these five streams are developing in different ways and we are just now figuring out why. The repeated disturbances created by road-building, vehicular traffic, and increased sedimentation would be a man-made influence on these systems that would significantly alter their evolutionary trajectories. The proposed road route would cross three of these streams at their headwaters, effectively influencing all downstream communities. The proposed road would cross the other two streams at upstream locations, preserving only a small fraction of stream length above the proposed road. **An Environmental Impact Statement is necessary to fully and accurately assess how the proposed road will impact this fragile and unique ecosystem.**

In addition, an objection resolution meeting should be held to address the concerns of scientists working on the Pumice Plain.

Please make a decision to protect the natural landscape of the Pumice Plain, ongoing ecological research, and native ecological communities against the spread of non-natives.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Joy M. R. Hobbs", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Joy M. R. Hobbs
Research Scientist
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