



July 1, 2020

Erin Uloth
District Ranger, Mt. Baker Ranger District
Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest

Submitted Electronically: comments-pacificnorthwest-mtbaker-snoqualmie-mtbaker@usda.gov

RE: North Fork Nooksack Vegetation Management Project

Dear District Ranger Uloth,

On behalf of The Mountaineers, thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on your scoping notice for the North Fork Nooksack Vegetation Management Project.

The Mountaineers, based in Seattle, Washington and founded in 1906, is a nonprofit outdoor education, conservation, and recreation organization whose mission is “to enrich the community by helping people explore, conserve, learn about and enjoy the lands and waters of the Pacific Northwest and beyond.” The Mountaineers Books publishing division expands the mission internationally through award-winning publications including instructional guides, adventure narratives, and conservation photography. 1,600 skilled volunteers lead 3,200 outdoor education trips and courses annually for 14,000 members. Our youth programs provide over 10,000 opportunities each year for children to get outside. We are a passionate, engaged, and knowledgeable community that cares about the outdoors, and protects the outdoor experience for current and future generations.

As a conservation-oriented recreation organization based in Western Washington, we have a strong interest in current and future management activities in the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. We are appreciative of aspects of the NF Nooksack Vegetation Project that seek to improve access to popular recreation areas, enhance wildlife habitat, and support the local economy. At this point in the project development process, we are interested in learning more about the Forest Service’s proposed vegetation management activities and their potential effects on the forest ecosystems, aquatic resources, and recreation of the North Fork Nooksack landscape. As you continue to work on this project and prepare a Draft Environmental Analysis, we offer the following comments to address potential impacts to recreation from this project:



Outline potential impacts or changes to trailheads

We encourage further details in the Environmental Assessment on any changes to trailheads that would impact access to recreation opportunities in the area. We are particularly interested in Heliotrope Ridge trailhead, which provides access to heavily used climbing areas on Mount Baker: the popular Coleman-Deming climbing route, the Lower Coleman Glacier and Seracs, and the North Ridge climbing route. The Mountaineers climbing courses conduct numerous trips in these areas to teach alpine climbing, ice climbing, and crevasse rescue. We are also interested in the Damfino Lakes Trailhead, which provides access to the High Divide trail and Excelsior Peak, as well as the Welcome Pass Trailhead – both popular hiking areas with our community. Details about how these thinning efforts may impact the experience of hikers and climbers will help us communicate this to our community.

Reduce impacts to recreational access during project work

As the ongoing project work for this vegetation management plan may affect recreational access and the outdoor recreation experience, we encourage you to consider mitigation and improvement measures to reduce user conflict and ensure recreationists can access the project area while work is being conducted:

- Provide recreation site improvements such as trail reroutes and trailhead parking lot modifications;
- Reduce the closure period as much as possible during the peak season (May through October) and consider impacts to winter recreation use during the non-peak season (November through April);
- Limit any logging-related special closure(s) of highly desired recreation sites such as the Heliotrope Ridge Trailhead for the non-peak season (November through April);
- Provide public access during the peak and non-peak recreation seasons through or near units being thinned to reach developed and dispersed recreation sites on weekends and holidays; and
- Incorporate scenery management techniques such as visual screening, feathering vegetation and low stump cutting.

Include public involvement and outreach

Given the scope of this project and the potential impacts to popular trails and recreation sites, The Mountaineers recommends ongoing outreach and public involvement with the project in addition to the formal public process.

Thank you for considering our scoping comments on the North Fork Nooksack Vegetation Management Project. We appreciate the opportunity to engage in this project, and are grateful of your work to facilitate sustainable recreation access in the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. We look forward to learning more about the project as it develops.



**THE
MOUNTAINEERS**

7700 Sand Point Way NE
Seattle, WA 98115

www.mountaineers.org

Sincerely,

Betsy Robblee
Conservation & Advocacy Director
betsyr@mountaineers.org