



Kittitas County, Washington
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

District One
Cory Wright

District Two
Laura Osiadacz

District Three
Brett Wachsmith

September 5, 2025

Mr. Scott Robinson
Cle Elum District Ranger
U.S. Forest Service
803 W. 2nd Street
Cle Elum, WA 98922

RE: Upper Swauk Restoration Project Draft Environmental Assessment Comments

Dear Mr. Robinson,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed Upper Swauk Restoration Project draft environmental assessment. The Kittitas County Board of County Commissioners (BOCC) supports the U.S. Forest Service's intent to restore forest health, reduce wildfire risk, and improve watershed conditions within our region. However, we are writing today to express our concerns about the extent of road closures and decommissioning proposed in this project and the resulting impact on public access, local recreation, emergency response, and long-standing land use patterns in Kittitas County.

Concerns About Proposed Road Decommissioning and Closure

While we understand the ecological rationale for removing certain roads, particularly those contributing to sedimentation or habitat fragmentation, the scale of proposed decommissioning in the Upper Swauk area appears excessive and disproportionate when weighed against the critical need for access in this part of the county. The roads in question are not only used for forest management, but also for:

- **Public recreation** (hiking, hunting, camping, ORV use, and snowmobiling),
- **Access to private inholdings and leased lands,**
- **Fire suppression and emergency response,** and
- **Traditional and cultural uses by local residents and Tribes.**

We understand the fragmented nature of these proposed road closures and their variable patterns of access across this area. However, with over 50 miles of proposed lost access via closure and/or decommissioning, we must strenuously request additional opportunity to provide supplementary comments on behalf of our constituents who use this network. Many of these roads have been in continuous use for decades and represent an important part of Kittitas County's access infrastructure into the upper forested watersheds. Permanent closure or decommissioning of these roads may result in long-term loss of access that cannot be easily reversed, especially under future forest and fire conditions that are increasingly unpredictable. Additionally, the BOCC passed Resolution 2019-061 adopting a "No Net Loss" policy (enclosed) when potential road closures on our public lands are proposed.

Request for Reevaluation and Coordination

We respectfully request the Forest Service provide the Kittitas County Public Lands Advisory Committee (PLAC) additional opportunity to reexamine the full list of roads slated for closure or decommissioning. The PLAC is a key forum comprised of citizen members advising the BOCC on potential state and federal landowning agencies' actions. Committee members collectively have well over a century of experience using our county's public lands via roads and trails, and have proven an invaluable resource when examining questions of potential lost access. We ask that your representatives work with the PLAC to

obtain feedback on changes to this road network prior to making any final decision.

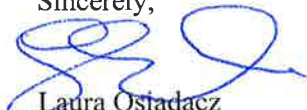
Balanced Restoration Is Key

Kittitas County supports the underlying goals of the Upper Swauk Restoration Project—healthier forests, improved habitat, and reduced wildfire risk. However, these goals must be balanced with sustainable and equitable access for those who live, work, and recreate in the region. We are concerned that the current proposal risks significantly diminishing access to public lands without fully accounting for the long-term consequences to the community.

We ask that the Forest Service approach road management with flexibility and a commitment to retaining core public access routes wherever possible.

Thank you for your consideration of these concerns. The Kittitas County Board of Commissioners remains committed to working collaboratively with the Cle Elum Ranger District and other partners to achieve restoration goals while ensuring continued access to our public lands.

Sincerely,



Laura Osiadacz
Chair



Cory Wright
Vice Chair



Brett Wachsmith
Commissioner

Enclosures: 1

**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
COUNTY OF KITTITAS
STATE OF WASHINGTON**

RESOLUTION

NO.: 2019- 061

**POSITION STATEMENT FROM KITTITAS COUNTY BOARD OF
COMMISSIONERS: “NO NET LOSS” FOR PUBLIC ACCESS ON PUBLIC ROADS**

WHEREAS: Public lands constitute nearly 71 percent of the total land area of Kittitas County; and

WHEREAS: Kittitas County values the partnerships developed with all public land managers within the county; and

WHEREAS: Public land managers requested a definition from the Kittitas County Board of Commissioners for “No Net Loss” for public access on public roads; and

WHEREAS: Kittitas County Commissioners established the Kittitas County Public Lands Advisory Committee November 18, 2013 with the adoption of Resolution 2013-134; and

WHEREAS: The Kittitas County Public Lands Advisory Committee’s By-Laws state, “Public lands are a vital community resource. The vision of the Public Lands Advisory Committee is to create cooperative relationships with public lands managers to ensure that public lands in Kittitas County provide access for the public and are sustainably managed for multiple uses while providing opportunities for outdoor recreation and economic benefit to County residents; and

WHEREAS: On June 9, 2016 the Kittitas County Board of Commissioners Adopted Resolution 2016-076 approving a county recreation plan: The Kittitas County Park, Recreation, and Open Space (PROS) Plan wherein Policy 6.5.1 states, “Coordinate and support a comprehensive system of off-road 4-wheel drive and all-terrain vehicle trails and backcountry roads that access scenic, environmental, historic, and open space attributes throughout Kittitas County expanding and linking existing trail systems in the urban and upper county areas into area-wide networks including the Wenatchee National Forest, Teanaway Community Forest, Naneum Ridge State Forest, LT Murray, Oak Creek, Wenas, Colockum, and Whiskey Dick Wildlife Areas; and

WHEREAS: Kittitas County Board of Commissioners support “No Net Loss” for public access on public roads in Kittitas Count and across the State of Washington; and

WHEREAS: The definition for “No Net Loss” was vetted through the Public Lands Advisory Committee with participation from public land manager;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED: That the Board of County Commissioners defines how the community achieves “No Net Loss” for public access on public roads as being:

To achieve “No Net Loss” any established road or roads that are currently open which are permanently eliminated for the use of public travel by way of motorized transportation on public land or a public road should be replaced in the system by another road giving passage into the same geographical area.

The following methods, appearing below, are used to achieve “No Net Loss” for public access on public roads.

How to Mitigate for Road Closures

(1) If the State or Federal Agency can demonstrate unequivocally why the permanent road closure is necessary and/or mandatory with no alternative to give passage into the same geographical area they can replace that road loss with a comparable road network by going through a public process with meetings and outreach efforts conducted in the county affected. This should aim to provide a road network that is equal to or superior to the original road as determined by public input.

(2) When a State or Federal Agency purchases private land with existing roads they shall go through a public process with meetings and outreach efforts conducted in the county affected to assist in determining which roads shall remain open for public use by motorized transportation. In this process roads should aim to provide access to distinct geographic areas, scenic or interesting wildland experience, and lands that have a defined historical importance.

DATED this 25th day of March, 2019 at Ellensburg, Washington.

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
KITITAS COUNTY, WASHINGTON


Cory Wright, Chairman

ABSENT

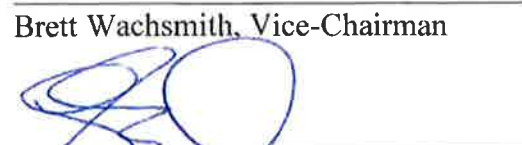
Attest:

☒ Clerk of the Board- Julie Kjorsvik

☐ Deputy Clerk of the Board- Mandy Buchholz



Brett Wachsmith, Vice-Chairman


Laura Osiadacz, Commissioner