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Comments: Thirty-nine years ago, the Pumice Plain at Mount St. Helens was a sterilized blast zone; nothing survived the pyroclastic flow. Today, prairie lupine and scarlet paintbrush bloom against the gray basalt and teams of researchers work year after year to understand the ecology of volcanic disturbance.

Those native plants and irreplicable research projects are at risk. The US Forest Service has proposed building a road across the Pumice Plain. This will have significant adverse impacts on plant communities, compromising the ecological integrity of the area and disrupting on-going research. While the proposed project addresses legitimate concerns raised regarding the management of Spirit Lake water levels to protect downstream public safety and property, it does not adequately recognize the importance of also protecting long-term, ongoing research projects.

I believe it is critical that the public safety concerns be addressed with a minimum of disruption to the plant communities and research projects located at the site.