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Comments:
We are commenting on the Upper Wenatchee Pilot Project restoration efforts, specifically the plans for road decommissioning of the Lower Chiwawa spur roads from NF Roads 6120 and 6121. We especially support the closure of the spur roads off 6121-120, -125 and 127 and its network of user-created roads, due to their close proximity to the west bank of the Chiwawa River in the lower Chiwawa riparian area.
We have been homeowners, neighbors to US Forest Service land in this area since the early 1990s, and one of us is a professional civil engineer and consultant. We have noticed significant degradation of the adjacent Forest Service lands due to adverse impacts of the roads in the area, and especially a significant increase in the rate of damage in the past two years (2019-2020). This seems to us to correlate with a noticeable increase in the number of passenger vehicles attempting to access the riverfront using this network of roads in all seasons (including use by 4-wheeled passenger vehicles during the wintertime).
There has been demonstrable increase in litter, noise (firearms and amplified music), human waste, and large-scale bench and table construction from downed timber. These activities are dispersed, but often center on unofficial campsites along the west bank of the Chiwawa River, along these roads. On several occasions we have noted serious hazards of active campfires and explosive target-shooting in the area during burn-bans in the months of July, August, and September.
Since these spur roads were originally constructed for temporary logging and fuel reduction activities, minimal soils erosion and sediment controls measures were installed. Erosion in the roadbeds has been notably increasing, exposing hazards which vehicles then attempt to avoid by driving cross-country. Increased vehicle use has created sites for vehicles of all types to engage in "mudding" in vernal streambeds, and "high-marking" along old riverbanks. As a result of these activities, we have observed increased sediment loads in the vernal streams that run into the Chiwawa River.
As homeowners, we appreciate the efforts of the USFS to mitigate wildfire risk in this Project area. We do hope to see increasingly science-based decisions regarding the goals of protecting rare plants, whitebark pine, and wildlife. We are especially hoping that restoration efforts might improve habitat such that someday we might be able to show our grandchildren salmon returning to spawn in the Chiwawa River.
In summary we support the efforts of the USFS to restore watershed health as proposed by either the implementation of Option 1 or Option 2.