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Title: North Cascades Regional Rep

Comments: March 28, 2022

District Ranger Aaron Stockton

Naches Ranger District

10237 Highway 12

Naches, WA 98937

RE: Comment on Little Naches Upland Restoration Draft Environmental Assessment

Dear Aaron Stockton:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Little Naches Upland Restoration draft EA. I am writing on behalf of the more than 14,500 members of the Pacific Crest Trail Association (PCTA). PCTA is the Forest Service's primary private partner in the management and maintenance of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail (PCT). The foundation for this private-public partnership is the 1968 National Trails System Act. It is the PCTA's role to work with the Forest Service to ensure the best possible management of the PCT and the experience it affords trail users, year-round, and to engage the public in its preservation. PCTA understands the purpose and need for the vegetation management, road removal, and other restoration projects contained in this NEPA document. We support your efforts to promote the desired conditions contained in the Wenatchee National Forest Plan and recognize the need for healthy stands that respond to disturbances in a resilient manner.

This comment letter is primarily focused on the management of the Pacific Crest Trail. I appreciate the ways in which the draft EA recognizes PCTA's role in managing the PCT and assuring an outstanding trail experience. The EA states that PCTA staff will be invited to participate in the design of vegetation management treatments along the PCT. Thank you for including this language. The EA also pays special attention to protecting the scenery in the corridor around the PCT. You clearly display on the included maps that the area around the trail has a visual quality objective of retention based on the Wenatchee National Forest Plan. I am grateful to the planning team for taking note of the importance of visual resources to the PCT and calling out the special attention that must be paid to protect the scenery in the foreground and midground around the trail. Through thoughtful treatment design and the thorough use of best management practices, I believe that the scenic resources around the PCT will be well protected. I am similarly encouraged that the EA contains a thorough list of BMPs and design criteria that will be taken to retain the current trail experience.

PCTA staff look forward to working with you to design treatments to meet the standards in this document. I know the PCT in the project area well. Last summer I hiked the PCT through all the parcels that overlap the PCT where thinning is planned. I saw many people enjoying the trail. I was therefore pleased to see the language in the EA that promised to mitigate possible impacts to recreation including to the PCT. I appreciate the assurance in the document that PCTA and the public will be notified of any closures to trails and other recreation infrastructure.

The PCT receives high use throughout the summer. Any closure to PCT would need to be carefully considered to reduce impacts to the public. Given the topography and the PCT's location in the northwest edge of the project area, noncommercial thinning could likely occur without closing the PCT to travel. I would have preferred to see in the EA language that stated that the PCT would be closed only if essential for public safety and only closed for the minimal time practical to complete the work adjacent to the trail. Additionally, I would like to remind the planning team that based on an MOU between the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest and the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest the PCT between Norse Peak Wilderness and Blowout Mountain is administered by

the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, Snoqualmie Ranger District. If it is deemed necessary to close the PCT and detour the public around vegetation management projects, then those closures should be coordinated with the neighboring National Forest and the USFS PCT administrator.

Thank you for your time and attention to this comment letter. I wish you all the best and look forward to working with you more on this effort.

Sincerely,

Michael DeCramer
PCTA North Cascades Regional Representative

CC:

Lindsey Steinwachs - PCT Program Administrator, USFS

Justin Kooyman - PCTA Associate Director of Trail Operations

Brian McNeil - Natural Resource Manager, Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest