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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear District Ranger Smith,

Thanks for the opportunity to comment on the proposed North Fork Stillaguamish Landscape Analysis project and for the information Zoom meeting last week. As a resident and long-time user of the North Fork valley I would like to offer these three main points related to the project.

1. Thinning of the overstocked second growth forests in the area indicated is a good idea and will also help to provide a little bit of timber to local mills. I have no issues with what is being proposed and have seen how successful other similar thins have been across the Forest. My fear is that various operational restrictions, complex unit boundaries, etc, could result in little or no interest from purchasers who have options to obtain volume in other areas at lower cost and risk.

2. My primary concern with this project is the potential to remove the Higgins and Round Mountain trails from the system. DO NOT decommission the Higgins, Myrtle Lake, and Round Mountain Trails! Decommissioning these trails for the reasons stated in the scoping letter would set a damaging precedent for the trail system on the MBS and perhaps beyond. Just because the trails do not currently meet basic maintenance needs is no reason to remove them. The same could be said for many other trails on the District. Many dozens of trail miles were already removed from the trail system during Forest Planning in 1990 and is ill advised at this time when recreation, and particularly trail use, is increasing at a rapid rate. Higgins and Round Mountains provide a particularly unique recreation experience on the west side of the Cascades outside of designated wilderness. Lightly used, they provide access to two mountain tops, including the historic lookout site on Higgins. The quiet nature of these trails is in stark contrast to Mt. Pilchuck or Sauk Mountain. The feel of the trails is remote - Alaska like - yet accessible to people. The historic lookout, Coney Pass and other features along these trails offer a unique understanding to this landscape. Their impact on the landscape is negligible and it would be more disruptive to attempt decommissioning actions on them than just let them continue as they are. I recognize that there are ROW issues with the road to the Higgins Trailhead and lower portion of the Higgins Trail. The length of the road walk in the scoping document is inaccurate. It is stated as a 4 mile walk from the gate on the C Post Road. Having walked this road many times, I can attest that it is closer to 2.8. There is an additional 0.8 miles of trail across DNR lands to reach the National Forest portion of the trail. This should not be a problem as the Forest Service and DNR share many trail miles on other trails around the state, including several in the South Fork Stillaguamish. My understanding is that the gate on the C Post Road is to prevent timber theft, illegal dumping, and indiscriminate shooting and is not meant to restrict use on the trail. I would like to see if the Forest Service could discuss occasional access on the road for the purpose of facilitating trail maintenance, and if an agreement could be worked out. Changing property ownership and/or land exchanges could alter access to this area in ways that cannot be anticipated at this time. Keeping these trails on the system will maintain flexibility for future management.

3. It is difficult to imagine what the proposal for new trails and integration with the DNR trails on North Mountain might look like. Please provide a map that shows where these trails would be, loop opportunities etc. During this process take advantage of the opportunity to discuss the Higgins Trail access with DNR. Adding trail miles here and removing two truly unique existing opportunities makes no sense to me.

4. A map is needed to get a better idea of the mixed-use transportation use being proposed.

5. I am concerned that the proposal for designated campsites sounds a bit too much like a linear campground with numbered sites, picnic tables, fire rings, etc. Would a fee and reservations be required for their use? My

fear is that these sites would need to be treated in a manner similar to developed sites and require annual evaluation for hazard trees. The public may be better served by continuing the current situation with physical barriers added at appropriate spots to limit vehicle access into environmentally sensitive areas.

6.Recreation improvements at Texas Pond are needed. While rarely crowded, there is almost always a group or two present at the pond. A trail around the ponds would be about 1.5 miles in length and likely include a fair amount of puncheon or turnpike and come with a pretty high price tag. One feature that is needed, but not mentioned, is a good kayak/canoe launching spot near the dam.

7.Please change the name of this analysis to reflect that the project is only looking at the northern half of the North Fork Stillaguamish drainage. The current name implies otherwise.

I look forward to seeing how this project evolves,

Sincerely,

Gary Paull