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Title: Northwest Regional Director

Comments: Comments on the Public Scoping Document

for the

Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail Comprehensive Plan

from National Parks Conservation Association

Northwest Regional Office, Seattle, WA

October 30, 2022

Submitted online

Dear Pacific Northwest Regional Forester,

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the scope of analysis for the Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail Comprehensive Plan.

National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA) is a national non-profit, non-partisan organization which has advocated for protection and support for our national parks and America's National Park System for more than a century. NPCA has more than 1.3 million members and supporters nationwide, with more than 45,000 living in Washington state.

The Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail (the Trail) goes through two major national parks in Washington state, Olympic and North Cascades, with extraordinary wilderness and wildlife values, and both are already well-used by backcountry visitors. We appreciate that these places and values have been recognized in the draft Carrying Capacity Report which accompanies the scoping document, but urge that specific mention of high-use areas and protected species and habitat be made in the scoping document to make sure these landscapes are areas of high priority for resource protection.

The Western end of the Trail begins along the Ozette coast of Olympic National Park. This is an area already popular with those seeking a remote wilderness experience. Water sources are limited as are campsites to protect this sensitive coastal strip from overuse. This area should be explicitly noted and permit limitations adhered to so that this extraordinary wilderness opportunity remains intact for the future.

The Trail also is routed into the heart of Olympic National Park through the Sol Duc/Seven Lakes Basin, a highly scenic but already heavily used area with strict limitations on overnight use and campsite locations. This area, too, should be explicitly mentioned and existing restrictions adhered to with resource protection as a top concern.

The Trail passes through four grizzly bear recovery zones identified through the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Grizzly Bear Recovery Plan. The North Cascades Ecosystem, centered around North Cascades National Park Complex, remains a top priority for future recovery of the grizzly bear and is the only remaining suitable habitat along the West Coast in the coterminous United States. The National Park Service (NPS) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service initiated an Environmental Impact Statement in 2014 to evaluate the best methods to achieve grizzly bear recovery here. Meanwhile, British Columbia is also working towards grizzly recovery across the border in this shared ecosystem. The Trail is routed through habitat critical for grizzly recovery in the North Cascades on both NPS and U.S. Forest Service land. Protection of core habitat, limits on hiker numbers and potential impact of future trail routes should be explicitly considered in the plan for this grizzly recovery area with top concern for assuring the success of recovery of this threatened species.

In summary, the extraordinary areas and experiences which the Trail offers to hikers should be clearly acknowledged and understood in the plan, with top priority given to long-term protection of natural resources so that future generations can enjoy them as we do now.

Sincerely,

Rob Smith

Northwest Regional Director

National Parks Conservation Association

