Data Submitted (UTC 11): 3/16/2023 8:48:05 PM
First name: Michael
Last name: DeCramer
Organization: Washington Trails Association
Title: Policy and Planning Manager
Comments: March 16, 2023

Greta Smith
District Ranger
Darrington Ranger District
1405 Emens Avenue North
Darrington, WA 98241

RE: North Fork Stillaguamish Landscape Analysis Draft Environmental Assessment
Submitted via https://cara.fs2c.usda.gov/Public//CommentInput?Project=61659

Dear District Ranger Smith,

We want to thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the North Fork Stillaguamish Landscape Analysis Draft Environmental Assessment. This letter is written on behalf of Washington Trails Association to express our thoughts on the EA and ask further questions about the project.

Washington Trails Association has a more than 50-year legacy of engaging the hiking community. WTA enhances hiking experiences in Washington by empowering a diverse and growing community of hikers to explore, steward and protect trails and public lands. WTA is the nation's largest state-based trail maintenance and hiking advocacy nonprofit organization, with more than 26,000 member households. In 2022, WTA crews contributed over 152,000 hours of work towards the stewardship of trails across the state. This extensive amount of volunteer trail maintenance speaks to the public's deep passion for trails and recreation. WTA crews are an important part of the trail maintenance efforts on the Darrington Ranger District. Last year, WTA led 67 days worth of trail projects on the district. Working in close partnership with Forest Service staff, we can collectively increase the public's ability to enjoy the Mount. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest.

WTA believes there is value in having a wide spectrum of recreational opportunities in the North Fork Stillaguamish Landscape. For that reason we were pleased that the proposed action did not include the decommissioning of Mount Higgins Trail #640, Myrtle Lake Trail #640.1 and Round Mountain Trail #664. During scoping the Forest Service discussed eliminating these trails. We appreciate that trail decommissioning was omitted from the proposed activities in the environmental assessment. Thank you for making this change.

Both Alternative 2 and Alternative 3 propose changes to the maintenance level of system roads including decommissioning roads that are no longer needed. The assessment states, "Alternatives 2 and 3 would have no long-term effect on the types and forms of various recreation within the project area and would provide an opportunity to potentially improve the recreation experience through road maintenance and recreation management activities" (55). We reviewed the road system maps in Appendix A. Based on the maps in Figure 6, 7 and 8 the Forest Service proposes to lower the maintenance classification on NF-17 from "High degree of user comfort" to "Moderate degree of user comfort". This change is not discussed in the environmental assessment. Road 17 is located almost entirely outside of the project area. Can you provide more information on the rationale for this change and why it is included in both Alternative 2 and Alternative 3? Reducing the maintenance standard of a major access road into this landscape is likely to have a negative impact on the public's recreational experiences.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on the North Fork Stillaguamish Draft Environmental

Assessment. We would be happy to answer any question you have about our comments.

Sincerely,

Michael DeCramer
Policy and Planning Manager
Washington Trails Association