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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Re: I-90 Snoqualmie Pass East - Public Safety/Wildlife Closure Area, Draft EA - Project #349472

To David Farmer, Acting Forest Supervisor, c/o Dan Leininger, Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Draft Environmental Assessment for the proposed public safety/wildlife closure area along I-90 Snoqualmie Pass East. I am writing in strong support of this proposal.

Wildlife crossing structures only function as intended when the surrounding habitat remains undisturbed enough for animals to actually use them. Human activity concentrated near overcrossings and undercrossings-foot traffic, parking, off-trail use-can deter the very species these structures are built to help, undermining years of investment and construction. Extending the closure to cover the additional 7 miles now under construction or in design, alongside the 8 miles already under emergency closure since 2019, is a sensible and necessary step to protect the integrity of this habitat connectivity project as it nears completion.

I also support including the wetland restoration sites within the closure area. These wetlands serve as required mitigation under the Clean Water Act and are essential to offsetting the broader footprint of the I-90 corridor project. Protecting them from disturbance during their establishment period is critical to their long-term ecological function, including water filtration, flood buffering, and habitat for wetland-dependent species.

I appreciate that the proposal carefully balances conservation needs with continued public access: keeping roads open to a defined distance from the shoulder, preserving access on groomed winter trails, and avoiding any restriction on developed facilities or open trails. This thoughtful design shows that wildlife protection and continued recreational and practical use of the forest are not mutually exclusive.

I would encourage the Forest Service to:

Adopt the proposed 5-year extension of the closure, and consider whether a longer-term or permanent closure designation may ultimately be warranted once the full I-90 SPE project is complete and its effectiveness can be evaluated.

Ensure adequate signage, public education, and enforcement resources are in place so that visitors understand the purpose of the closure and comply with it, particularly around the Gold Creek crossing structures and the no-parking area on FS-4832.

Include a monitoring component to track wildlife use of the crossing structures over time, and use that data to inform future adjustments to the closure boundaries if needed.

This project represents an important, science-based investment in habitat connectivity in the Cascades, and I fully support the Forest Service's effort to protect it during this critical establishment period.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,