

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 8/31/2026 11:09:50 PM

First name: Randy

Last name: Nikolai

Organization: Washington Ski Touring Club

Title: President

Comments: Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the USFS EA & FONSI for wildlife closure. In the big picture the Washington Ski Touring Club supports the efforts to separate wildlife from traffic on I-90 as a matter of public safety. We are a 45+ year old cross country and back country ski club with over 160 members who enjoy winter recreation in the Cascades and beyond.

While we support the overall goal, we have deep concerns regarding the lack of details and clarity regarding the impact of the proposed closures as they relate to the recreation on the Cabin Creek area trails - both groomed and ungroomed routes. The current maps available from your office are not clear, due to poor resolution. The guiding information states there is "no impact on winter recreation", yet there is impact if boundaries are so tightly drawn as to restrict recreation only to the existing groomed trails but does not recognize other historic ungroomed but still used trails. For example, the route from exit 62 heading west of the sno-park parking lot to the road south of exit 63. This route is and has been used for decades by cross-country skiers and sno-shoers who prefer an ungroomed experience.

In addition, the tightly drawn boundaries along the currently groomed trails do not allow room for future safe bypasses of a couple of steep hills that are dangerous for beginners, older skiers or in poor grooming conditions. A broader boundary adjacent to the Cabin Creek trails would allow landowner approved modifications in the future without a cumbersome amendment to this closure. A slightly larger approved recreation area at Cabin Creek would still be tiny in the scheme of the many miles of the larger closure area along I-90.

The plan should also address summer access to the Cabin Creek trails and roads for recreation including hiking and mountain biking as well as for maintenance projects on the cross-country ski trails. Members of the Washington Ski Touring Club participate as volunteers at many of the trail work party days sponsored by the Kongsberger Ski Club in the summer and fall. These projects are important to ensure the rocks, trees and other obstacles are removed from the roads each year, so they are ready for official sno park grooming when the snow arrives. It is not clear in the current plan that these type of summer uses of this relatively small area would still be allowed.

Clarification on signs of the allowed uses and restrictions near the areas where winter travel is allowed will be very important. The current signs along the north side of Lake Keechelus do not mention winter recreation access, even though there were cross country ski trails there for decades as documented in Vicki Spring's guide to cross country skiing (Mountaineers Books).

Another concern is the lack of stakeholder input in the drafting of the proposed closure plan. While some informal conversations may have occurred with a few individuals, there was no public stakeholder planning meeting where a meaningful dialogue could have occurred, and these types of concerns could have been clarified in advance of the proposed closure. Had there been a public notice of such a meeting to parties on the forest service e-mail list, or at least to known organizations then clarity on recreation impact could have occurred.

The WSTC does not seek to prevent the larger proposed closure but urges that the plan better accommodate long-standing recreational uses. To that end, we seek to establish a collaborative relationship between recreation stakeholders and the Forest Service for the management of lands in the Cabin Creek area.