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Organization: Upper Skagit Indian Tribe

Title:

Comments: LETTER PASTED BELOW FROM ATTACHMENT

To: Erin Uloth, Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest Supervisor
Cc: Louis "Ted" Neff, District Ranger Mt. Baker Ranger District, Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest
Cc: Caitrin Engle, Tribal Relations Specialist, Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest
Re: Draft Environmental Assessment - Mt. Baker Geothermal Consent to Lease Project
The Upper Skagit Indian Tribe (USIT) acknowledges the Forest Service's efforts to incorporate concerns raised during tribal consultation into the proposed lease stipulations. In particular, we support the proposed No Surface Occupancy (NSO) stipulations protecting Traditional Cultural Places (TCPs), sacred sites, and other areas of important cultural value, as well as stipulations protecting riparian areas, fisheries resources, and other sensitive resources. Even with these improvements, USIT remains opposed to geothermal exploration and development within the Baker River watershed, an area of major significance to the Tribe. The Baker River watershed contains treaty-protected resources, Traditional Cultural Places, sacred sites, cultural landscapes, and fisheries resources that remain central to the Tribe's history, identity, and continuing cultural practices. USIT remains concerned that issuance of geothermal leases may increase future pressure for exploration and development within the Baker River watershed despite its significant cultural, ecological, and treaty importance. While the proposed stipulations provide important protections, they do not fully resolve concerns regarding potential impacts to culturally significant landscapes, treaty-protected resources, and the interconnected ecological and hydrologic systems of the Baker River watershed. Should leasing move forward, USIT expects continued government-to-government consultation throughout any future exploration, development, or permitting process. USIT requests that the Forest Service not consent to geothermal leasing within the Baker River watershed. Thank you for your consideration of these comments.
Scott Schuyler
Natural & Cultural Resources Policy Representative
Upper Skagit Indian Tribe
Note: USIT incorporates by reference its previous comments during earlier stages of environmental review and government-to-government consultation.