

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 8/28/2026 9:00:48 PM

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Title:

Comments: I-90 USFS "Public Safety/Wildlife Closure Area" De facto Exclusion Zone

Reference: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/r06/okanogan-wenatchee/projects/349472>

While it does except "within 30' of existing Winter Trails" and roads, has the USFS staff considered the chilling effect on responsible citizens who actually use our National Forests for appropriate activities?

Thank you for affording citizens the opportunity to provide input. We can only hope that cooler heads will prevail and prevent the "I-90 Exclusion Zone" from being enacted.

Please accept my objection to the plan as listed and I request to be included in future discussions. The initial 30 day Comment Period has been noted by many as artificially short and the USFS Cle Elum staff has been less than helpful for dissenting values to be considered. Please note the Kittitas County Commissioners input regarding legal precedent issues.

I am very disturbed by the rushed process, lack of input by many user groups, and other stake holders. Especially in light of the how the CleElum USFS staff conducted their Gold Creek Pond closure process.

I am more concerned that the supposed benefit to wildlife is really a hoax and just an excuse by a few personalities, and other entities, to keep people out of "their" woods.

Does anyone else recognize that miscreants who cause vandalism will never abide by any USFS regulations anyway?

Traffic safety does benefit from the elk fences, and wildlife over-passes and under-passes. These do help reduce collisions and provide for a wildlife migration across the I-90 barrier. They are very expensive to build. And to remain valuable, they must be properly maintained.

Yes--We've had too many animal vs motor vehicle collisions. Resulting in multiple human and animal fatalities, with more injuries, and expensive car repairs. I've hauled enough elk out of the hills to tell you that you really do not want to have a collision with one. Animals have been crossing the I-90 corridor with little changes in their behavior since time immemorial, when people first started using Snoqualmie Pass as an east-west transportation route.

However--The concept that wildlife need such a large 'human exclusion zone' is a total fabrication. While protecting the immediate area around the wild-life bridges and underpasses is reasonable, closing the entire north side of I-90 is not. It would be reasonable to include the actual over/under pass, and a 100m radius from each end as an area where camping or continued presence is discouraged. OK to hike through or paddle under, etc... My observations are that animals migrating on the same routes since the last Ice Age, are resistant to changing their patterns, regardless of human presence.

While leading maintenance work parties on the Cabin Creek XC ski trail system, I have observed deer, elk, and black bears. On Amabilis Mountain, cougar. Early morning skis reveal a multitude of smaller animal tracks over the freshly groomed ski trail. All while near areas with human activity.

From Hyak (X54) to the Stampede Pass road (X62), the existing 'elk fence' on both sides of I-90 is a good thing. However, there are several gaps. So it is not a total barrier, resulting in not all animals being funneled into the over/under passes. The rest of the I-90 upgrade on down to Easton (X70) will need similar treatment, as well as

ensuring that both sides of I-90 are considered.

10 years ago, I helped with repairing the elk fence along I-90 near North Bend. It was installed in the mid-1970's when that part of I-90 was constructed. It was very obvious that NO MAINTENENCE had been done since. There were multiple trees down on it, overgrown with brush, and even a 100 yard section where an adjacent land owner had cut it out.

The Elk Fence from Hyak to Easton must be maintained or it will not do any good keeping large animals (elk/deer/bears/etc...) off I-90. Will WSDOT/USFS/WDFW (others?) prioritize staff and funding to maintain it? I did not find anything in the public facing documents advertising this.

Everyone who enjoys cross country skiing on the Cabin Creek Sno-Park trail system should be grateful that these 'winter trails' were not part of the exclusion zone. However, the nature of this regulation will preclude any trail improvements, re-alignment, or expansion. Anyone who skis here will tell you how crowded the groomed trails are on weekends and how much more adjacent land could be utilized for additional KM's of ski trails to reduce this congestion. How about a separate snow-shoe trail so the groomed XC ski trail does not get roto-tilled and ruined for skiing until the next grooming cycle? A "Safety Short-Cut" at the intersections of Sections 13-14-23-24 to avoid a high-skill required hill and give beginner skiers an optional safer route? ADA compliant parking for para-skies? Any initiative to improve or even add to the existing trails has currently been denied. With this regulation, it will be legally forbidden. FOREVER. (well, maybe in 5 year increments.)

The rushed nature of this process is not appropriate. Rushing the process, links that did not work until 12 days into a 30 day comment period, and other administrative ploys, smacks of getting the exclusion zone in place before getting called on it. This is the same 'bum's rush' that was used to affect the Gold Creek Pond closure area.

Never mind snubbing the user groups who should be considered allies and stake holders. Especially those considered as impediments to the plan. Many people I've listened to consider themselves purposely silenced. Broken links on the website? Short response time? Staff 'too busy' due to fires, etc... Yes, it's that time of the year!

While WDFW did provide comment, conspicuous by their absence is any input from Rocky Mountain Elk Federation, Safari Club International, and other hunting related advocacy/stewardship groups. Who really do a lot for all wildlife, not just those you want to invite home for dinner. Another wildlife concept that gets ignored, is that the only reason we have any elk at all is because hunters made the financial investment and did the manual labor to re-introduce elk, and other species, after they were exterminated by market hunting by the early 1900's.

I have a number of friends who are in Ecology-related career fields. Will they speak up? Or at least let us know that we've been made an offer we can't refuse and that's just the way it is going to be. Or have they realized that if they do speak up against the party line, their career will be in jeopardy?

The construction, and especially maintenance, of elk fences, wildlife crossing over and under passes, will help reduce traffic collisions and provide animals with a safer migration route.

The chilling effect of this exclusion zone on citizen involvement as stewards and responsible National Forest users will far out-weigh any fabricated benefit to wildlife.

Thank you for your consideration,
Jim Slyfield