

\* American Whitewater \* Cascade Forest Conservancy \* Conservation Northwest \*  
\* Pilchuck Audubon Society \* Sierra Club \* The Mountaineers \* The Wilderness Society \* Trout Unlimited \*  
\* Washington Trails Association \* Washington Wild \* WildEarth Guardians \*

Glenn Casamassa, Regional Forester  
U.S. Forest Service – Pacific Northwest Region  
1220 SW Third Avenue  
Portland, OR 97204

November 15, 2021

*Subject: Opportunity with Legacy Roads and Trails program*

Dear Mr. Casamassa:

We thank you and the rest of the Region 6 team for meeting with members of the Washington Watershed Restoration Initiative (WWRI) coalition on November 10. The meeting could not have been more timely given the passage of the *Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act*, which permanently authorizes the Forest Service Legacy Roads and Trails program and provides \$250 million in funding nationally over the next five years. As we shared, our coalition has been working since 2007 in support of this program, and we are thrilled with this legislative achievement.

Following are some key points that we made during the meeting:

- Since 2007, our coalition has helped secure nearly \$½ billion in appropriated funding for the Legacy Roads and Trails program to reduce impacts from roads and trails to water quality and fish habitat.
- Region 6 has been a national leader in implementing the Legacy Roads and Trails program through effective planning on a 3-year cycle, coordinating efforts of natural resources, engineering and recreation staff, aligning regional and forest priorities, communicating well with partners and achieving results. This well-coordinated approach should continue.
- The Region has many pieces in place to move forward quickly, including watershed condition action plans, aquatic organism passage priority list, travel analysis reports (minimum road system), GRAIP lite, climate change vulnerability assessments, “shelf-stock” of NEPA decision documents and the regional aquatic restoration EA.
- The Region should collaboratively allocate funds, set goals, and select projects:
  - Funding distribution could be: 40% essential road/trail projects in priority watersheds; 30% road/trail or AOP work outside priority watersheds; 25% priority fish passage/AOP’s; and 5% inventory & monitoring (GRAIP – before/after project monitoring).
  - Targeted goals/outcomes for 5 years could include (based on expected funding and data we’ve seen):
    - 100 priority watersheds have all their road/trail work completed
    - 350 barriers to fish passage are fixed, reconnecting X miles of streams
    - 50% of “likely not needed” roads are decommissioned<sup>1</sup>
    - 15% of the roads that are highest risk to aquatics are adapted to climate change

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<sup>1</sup> 12% of the Region’s road system was identified as “likely not needed” through the 2015 Travel Analysis Process.

- Project selection should consider:
  - First year, R6 staff can and should obligate funds expeditiously to complete projects that are already underway and where NEPA is completed, such as Dungeness, Calawah, Queets Road 2100, Snoquera, Tillicum and more.
  - With 5 years of assured funding, a multi-year program of work can be developed which enables staff and partners to plan and/or leverage funds.
  - Ensure the program follows the authorizing purpose: improve water quality and aquatic habitat for TES species.
  - Ensure results - important to show the public and congressional champions that priority work is being accomplished and what that means beyond just the outputs.
  - Ensure trail work is incorporated, including road-to-trail conversion where appropriate.

We heard from you (and Forest Service staff) that capacity continues to be a challenge. Many of us have been filling in gaps and will continue to do so as best as we can by managing contracts and contractors, offering volunteer work, coordinating partnerships, or sharing information with communities and Congress. We will continue to support the Forest Service in its' efforts to advocate for greater investment in agency personnel and growing internal expertise.

As you move forward, we request your continued focus and leadership on watershed and aquatic restoration both regionally and nationally. In the Pacific Northwest, achievement of restoration goals still requires a strong investment to reduce the impacts from the Agency's road system.

We ask that you continue to prioritize healthy watersheds and reliable recreational access by empowering your capable staff to swiftly take full advantage of the Legacy Roads and Trails program.

Thank you.

Sincerely,  
WWRI Coalition Members

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