



**THE
MOUNTAINEERS**

March 31, 2022

Sean Tackley
Gifford Pinchot National Forest
10600 N.E. 51st Circle
Vancouver, WA 98682

RE: Mount Adams South Climb / Cold Springs Trailhead Improvements #61704

Dear Mr. Tackley,

Washington Trails Association and The Mountaineers appreciate the opportunity to provide comment on the Mount Adams South Climb / Cold Springs Trailhead Improvements. We value your efforts to design this scoping process so that the future needs of multi-use visitor groups will be met.

Washington Trails Association has a more than 50-year legacy of engaging the hiking community. WTA enhances hiking experiences in Washington state by empowering a diverse and growing community of hikers to explore, steward and protect trails and public lands. WTA is the nation's largest state-based trail maintenance and hiking advocacy nonprofit organization, with more than 27,000 member households and an online community of more than 100,000. Each year almost 4,500 WTA volunteers perform over 160,000 hours of trail maintenance across the state.

The Mountaineers, based in Seattle, Washington and founded in 1906, is a nonprofit outdoor education, conservation, and recreation organization whose mission is "to enrich the community by helping people explore, conserve, learn about and enjoy the lands and waters of the Pacific Northwest and beyond." The Mountaineers Books publishing division expands the mission internationally through award-winning publications including instructional guides, adventure narratives, and conservation photography. 1,600 skilled volunteers lead 3,200 outdoor education trips and courses annually for 15,000 members. Our youth programs provide over 10,000 opportunities each year for children to get outside. The Mountaineers is a passionate, engaged, and knowledgeable community that cares about the outdoors, and protects the outdoor experience for current and future generations.

Our comments on this project can be found below. They are centered on the longer-term impacts of this project and planning for future changes to the recreation opportunities in the Mount Adams area. WTA and The Mountaineers support these recreation improvements, and are excited to see investments made to this popular area.

Project Scope

This project will add much-needed access to recreation areas in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest, and improve the visitor experience. We support these efforts to better disperse and manage use across the forest. The parking lot expansion will make more efficient use of the trailhead, and eliminate the environmental and emergency safety concerns that accompany roadside parking.

Many people visiting this project's planning area travel both up the trail towards the summit, and also on recreation opportunities that circumvent the mountain. Improved safety conditions before and at the trailhead facilitate a safer environment for more users to prepare as they embark on these trips. These trailhead improvements also provide a reinvigorated entrypoint to the various incredible hiking, climbing, and camping opportunities that the South Climb and Cold Springs area offer. When it is finished, the Cold Springs Trailhead will offer new and improved recreation access and help disperse recreationists throughout the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. We appreciate these planning efforts that contribute to safer, more accessible conditions for the many recreationists enjoying opportunities at the South Climb and Cold Springs access point.

Formalized camping and bathrooms areas will also enhance recreation opportunities for the many overnight visitors who enjoy the area. We appreciate the data analysis that went into evaluating and responding to the needs of overnight visitors and visitors in need of more developed amenities at the trailhead. Investing in this infrastructure in the area reduces environmental impact and offers opportunity for a wider range of users.

We also believe that there is potential to better align these trailhead improvements with other relevant efforts that will impact visitors to this area, like permitting and road maintenance. Considering the engagement, planning, and consultation needed for all of these changes, a process that accounts for each of these anticipated efforts can inform a more integrated set of improvements for the user. Incorporating the following topics (listed below) into a single planning process can reduce the work associated with three different projects while engaging users comprehensively on anticipated impacts.

Permitting: We are curious how the proposed trailhead changes associated with this project align with larger visioning efforts around the local trail network and intentions to implement permitting for future use. Understanding how improved access and facilities at the Cold Springs Trailhead will impact nearby trails and areas is critical to maintaining a holistically cared for trail system, and therefore responding to needs created by trailhead improvements. The improvements to infrastructure undertaken in this project may result in a reduced need for other types of user management like permitting.

Road Maintenance: While we understand that maintenance for the NF-8040 and NF-500 roads are outside of this project scope, we believe that formalizing road maintenance into planning efforts will help to improve the visitor experience for the planning area. We encourage the Forest to solidify road improvements as part of the trail improvements process and explore funding opportunities to further improve the road to the Cold Springs Trailhead.

Partnerships

Tribal Consultation: Changes to the Mount Adams South Climb visitor experience will likely increase recreation on nearby land managed by Yakama Nation. We appreciate the Forest Service's commitment to considerable tribal consultation in this process in order to work through mutual management options. We encourage further government-to-government cooperation as plans move forward.

User Engagement: We believe that the most sustainable outcomes are strengthened through thorough engagement processes with core stakeholders. As the Forest Service continues to propose changes that impact a variety of user groups, especially on such beloved and high-traffic areas like the Mount Adams South Climb and Cold Springs Trailhead, we encourage direct efforts to engage with user-groups – like climbers, day hikers, campers, and beyond – to better shape outcomes that most directly address impact and need for these communities. We hope that efforts that inspire changes for these user groups are informed by their input in order to plan most effectively for the full trail system.

Engagement with these communities is particularly important in the case of further management strategies, like permitting, that have high impact on use and access.

Conclusion

Recreation on and around Mount Adams is of enormous value to the recreation community. We appreciate this process's intent to better meet the needs of recreators and offer more formalized access to the area. Expansion of parking, camping, and trailhead access are critical improvements that will benefit our community and beyond.

Sincerely,



Andrea Imler
Advocacy Director
Washington Trails Association



Betsy Robblee
Conservation & Advocacy Director
The Mountaineers