



Washington Trails Association

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THE MOUNTAINEERS

(This letter is formatted and retained for records but will be submitted electronically as simple text at <https://parkplanning.nps.gov/commentForm.cfm?documentID=127552> as there is no option to attach a document in the NPS system)

May 2, 2023

Superintendent Greg Dudgeon
Mount Rainier National Park
55210 238th Avenue East
Ashford, WA 98304

RE: Fryingpan Creek Bridge Replacement Environmental Assessment

Dear Superintendent Dudgeon:

Washington Trails Association and The Mountaineers appreciate the opportunity to provide comments on the Fryingpan Creek Bridge Replacement planning process. Thank you for your staff's efforts to provide access and assure public safety by improving the Fryingpan Creek Bridge. The Mountaineers and WTA are close partner organizations. We submit this joint letter based on our shared understanding of the project and common belief that the public's interests are best served by Alternative B.

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 26,000 member households. WTA values our partnerships with Mt. Rainier National Park. WTA held 55 volunteer trail maintenance events in Mt. Rainier National Park in 2022. These projects contributed more than 8,000 hours of labor to the stewardship of the park. This extensive amount of volunteer trail maintenance speaks to the public's deep passion for trails and commitment to providing access in Mt. Rainier National Park.

The Mountaineers 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." 2,000 skilled volunteers lead 3,200 outdoor education trips and courses annually for nearly 16,000 members. Many of these trips and activities connect outdoor enthusiasts to the forests, trails, and glaciers in Mt. Rainier National Park. The Mountaineers is a passionate, engaged, and knowledgeable community that cares about the outdoors, and protects the outdoor experience for current and future generations. The Mountaineers is committed to ensuring equitable and sustainable recreation access to the Northwest's public lands and waters.

WTA and The Mountaineers understand the purpose and need for this project. Our members have benefited from the current Fryingpan Creek Bridge. Since its construction in 1931, the bridge has provided the public the ability to travel to the White River and Sunrise areas of the park. The span has served admirably, but it needs to be replaced to allow continued travel along Sunrise Highway. A new bridge is essential to providing access to sites west of Fryingpan Creek where people can experience enjoyment, education and inspiration. Failing to replace the span would leave an unacceptable high chance of future catastrophic failure of the bridge, such a failure would endanger human lives and environmental quality. Alternative A is unacceptable due to the high likelihood of bridge failure.

We believe that Mt. Rainier National Park's preferred alternative is the best choice. WTA and The Mountaineers encourage the responsible official to select Alternative B. This proposed action would improve public safety. Adding a 5-foot-wide sidewalk on the new bridge will allow visitors to walk across Fryingpan Creek and safely appreciate the scenic quality of the area. Creating a new parking lot on the west side of the bridge, in a location partially occupied by the current roadway, will further protect pedestrians from traffic by creating a masonry guardrail to separate visitors from Yakima Park Highway. Adding good parking options will also prevent visitor-created parking from expanding along the roadway.

The EA states that "between 15 to 40 designated parking spaces" will be created. We encourage you to build the new parking area to accommodate the higher end of the proposed range. This corridor is included in a proposed timed entry system to the park included in the Nisqually to Paradise Corridor Draft Management EA. This separate action proposes to restrict entry into the Sunrise area based partially on parking capacity at sites throughout Mt. Rainier National Park. We believe that expanding this parking lot in close proximity to an existing disturbance caused by the bridge replacement will provide better access for visitors, including hikers and backpackers seeking to enjoy the Wonderland Trail.

The bridge proposed in Alternate B would fully span the 100-year floodplain of Fryingpan Creek. Positioning the new abutments further away from the creek expands the channel migration zone. In addition to promoting natural channel processes, this alternative will make the roadway more resilient to the possibility of high water events which may be more likely due to climate change. We understand that

this project has potential environmental impacts including those connected to instream work. We appreciate that the preferred alternative addresses these potential impacts carefully. We believe that Alternative B is the best option to mitigate the risk to the environment. We must not wait for the current bridge to fail catastrophically and create greater impacts.

WTA and the Mountaineers appreciate the work that has gone into this EA. Thank you for giving attention to construction impacts on visitors and thoughtfully managing the need for trail and road closures. It is our hope that the proposed action will occur. Thank you for considering our comments. We would be happy to clarify any of the information we have provided or answer any question you might have.

Sincerely,

/s/ Michael DeCramer
Policy and Planning Manager
Washington Trails Association

/s/ Betsy Robblee
Conservation and Advocacy Director
The Mountaineers