

**Access Fund – American Alpine Club
American Whitewater – Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance
The Mountaineers - Washington Trails Association**

September 28, 2015

Washington State Department of Natural Resources
ATTN: Commissioner of Public Lands Peter Goldmark
1111 Washington St. SE
Olympia, WA 98504

Dear Commissioner Peter Goldmark:

The undersigned organizations respectfully submit this comment letter in support of the draft Recreational Trails Policy proposed by Washington State Department of Natural Resources. As representatives of the millions of trail users in Washington, we see this policy as a tool to strengthen the outdoor recreation community. Members of our organizations served on the committee that worked with DNR to express the needs of the recreation community and we applaud the agency for collaborating with recreation stakeholders in development of this policy.

The new vision stated in the policy reflects the need to provide access for multiple user groups while also ensuring recreation enhances public investment of the lands we all enjoy. The emphasis on community and stewardship reflects that the agency is considering current and future needs of trail users, the environment on which outdoor recreation depends, and growing demand for access.

We appreciate that the policy includes the following:

- The stated goals include providing recreational opportunities that have low impact on the land, expanding designated trails, and ensuring trail construction and maintenance costs remain low.
- Commitment to using Forest Service trail standards as primary design, construction and maintenance guidelines, but also developing supplemental standards where the USFS are found to be insufficient.
- Cost effectiveness and appropriate balance of development and maintenance in evaluation criteria.
- A mechanism whereby nondesignated trails may be incorporated into the recreational trail system where consistent with trail standards and management objectives.
- Recognition of the important role that volunteers can and should serve in trail development and maintenance.
- Minimizing impact on trails during forest management activities, including the addition of language in contracts and/or easements to provide access and mitigate impacts and restoring or rerouting portions of designated recreational trails.
- Continued commitment to community engagement and public outreach.

We look forward to continuing to work with DNR on implementing trail standards for sustainable trails that are cost effective for land managers and enjoyable for trail users. There is a need for balance between development of a trail system that is adequate for hikers, bikers, equestrians and other trail users along with concerns for future maintenance needs.

Our organizations recognize that, when appropriate, some human-powered dispersed recreation does not fit within the area or definition of designated trail use. We ask DNR to continue working with recreational organizations and stakeholders to steward and allow access to these areas, whether they are critical water access points or dispersed climbing areas.

Adopting Forest Service standards will help guide the agency in creating and maintaining high quality trails while avoiding the pitfalls of high-cost, overbuilt trails.

Trails on DNR lands are among some of the most popular in the state across a wide variety of trail users. As representatives of the outdoor recreation community, we thank DNR for taking the time to create a thoughtful, future-focused trail policy.

We look forward to continued collaboration.

Sincerely,

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Thomas O'Keefe, Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director, American Whitewater
Katherine Hollis, Conservation and Recreation Manager, The Mountaineers
Andrea Imler, Advocacy Director, Washington Trails Association
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