



October 31, 2016

Crilly Ritz
Senior Planner
Snohomish County Department of Public Works
3000 Rockefeller Avenue
Everett, WA 98201
Sent by electronic mail to crilly.ritz@snoco.org

RE: Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Repair of Milepost 6.4 – 6.9 of the Index-Galena Road

Dear Mr. Ritz:

The undersigned conservation and recreation organizations submit this letter in support of the proposed Index-Galena Road repair at mile post 6.4-6.9. We support the proposed repairs which will serve the dual purpose of restoring recreational, landowner, administrative and emergency access to the Index-Galena Road while also protecting the North Fork Skykomish River and the durability of the road by moving the route out of the river migration zone.

Preserving the Legacy of the Wild Sky Wilderness

Many of our organizations were deeply involved in the development and passage of the Wild Sky Wilderness Act of 2008. Early on, proponents of that proposal along with Senator Patty Murray and Congressman Rick Larsen reached out to local stakeholders. It was clear that local residents and recreation users placed significant value on the access provided by the Index-Galena Road. After the road washed out in 2006, Sen. Murray and Rep. Larsen worked with the Forest Service, Snohomish County and others to adjust proposed wilderness boundaries along the road corridor to ensure that continued road maintenance would not be impacted by a designation, which occurred in 2008. We appreciate that the EA (Pg. 78-79) acknowledges the Wild Sky Wilderness and indicates that the proposed realignment of the road segment is outside the Wilderness boundary.

The boundaries of the Wild Sky Wilderness were also drawn to protect the tributaries of the North Fork Skykomish River, which has been identified as suitable for Wild and Scenic designation under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. We appreciate that the EA (Pg. 89-90) addresses the river's suitability with respect to the Mt. Baker Snoqualmie National Forest Management Plan and the need to protect its free flowing character and outstandingly remarkable values.

Restoring and Enhancing Recreational Access

The repair of the Index-Galena Road will restore access to low elevation, multi-season recreational opportunities along the popular North Fork Skykomish River. We appreciate that the EA identifies the recreational access benefits associated with this project (EA Pg. 94-95). The Index-Galena road provides drive-in access to popular family destinations, popular launch sites for world-class whitewater boating opportunities, as well as incredible hiking, equestrian, cross country skiing, snowshoeing and climbing trails in the Wild Sky and Henry M. Jackson Wilderness Areas. These recreational destinations include:

- Blanca Lake Trail (#1052)
- Troublesome Creek Nature Trail (#1079)
- Quartz Creek Trail (#1050)
- North Fork Skykomish Trail (#1051)
- West Cady Ridge Trail (#1054)
- Curry Gap Trail
- Bald Eagle Trail (#650)
- Pass Creek (#1053)
- Troublesome Creek Campground
- San Juan Campground
- North Fork Skykomish Whitewater Run (Let's Make a Deal Rapid, Rooster Tail Rapid, and El Niño Rapids)
- Silver Creek Whitewater Run

Additionally in 2013, a Wild Sky Trail study produced by the Forest Service has identified a number of additional trails as potential opportunities along the same road corridor including the Frog Mountain Trail and Mineral Butte Trail.

While these destinations may be reached by way of a long detour on the mostly unpaved Beckler Road (FS #65), the Index-Galena Road provides the logical route for visitors coming from the Puget Sound region and as noted in the EA is a safer alternative particularly during winter months when the Becker Road is inaccessible. Additionally, the road is paved all the way to Troublesome Creek

The repair of the Index-Galena Road will bring with it economic benefits as well. Each year in Washington, outdoor recreation generates \$21.6 billion in consumer spending and 200,000 direct jobs.¹ The steady flow of visitors is critical to the economies of small towns in the Skykomish Valley like Index. Visitors stop to spend money on meals, buy groceries, purchase gear, sign up for paddling, horseback riding, backpacking or other recreational trips, and stay overnight at hotels and vacation rentals in towns that are the gateway to Wild Sky Country.

We feel that the rerouted section of road should be limited in width (i.e., travel lanes, shoulder, and clear zone) to be the same or narrower than the existing alignment in order to retain a quiet, low speed, and backcountry character. We support that the EA (Pg. 15-16) specification for a 22-foot paved surface with 10-foot travel lands and 1-foot shoulders designed for a 35 mph speed limit.

Balancing Recreational Access and a Sustainable Road System

Our organizations value access to our public lands, while working to protect them for future generations. We support repair and enhancement of important access roads like the Index-

¹"Economic Analysis of Outdoor Recreation in Washington State," Earth Economics. 2015.
<http://www.rco.wa.gov/documents/ORTF/EconomicAnalysisOutdoorRec.pdf>

Galena Road. At the same time, we also support decommissioning those Forest Service roads that do not provide planned recreational access, but carry high aquatic risk to our watersheds due to excessive maintenance costs. Many of the undersigned organizations are members of the Washington Watershed Restoration Initiative, which has worked to advocate for federal funding since 2008 to address these legacy roads through strategic repairs, stormproofing, and decommissioning to address water quality issues and restore fish passage.

Since federal funds will be sought for this project, we urge the County to carefully choose a final decision that is a cost-effective option to restoring recreational and administrative access to the Index-Galena Road. In the face of increasing storm events and climate change, we all share an interest in ensuring that the limited federal funds available for our road access to our national forests goes as far as possible.

We believe that the proposed action can be carried forth in a manner that benefits aquatic resources, enhances the wild and scenic values of the river, and restores access to outstanding recreational opportunities within the North Fork Skykomish corridor.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Environmental Assessment.

Sincerely,

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