



August 31, 2020

Joseph R. Neal, District Ranger
Skykomish Ranger District
P.O. Box 305
74920 N.E. Stevens Pass Highway
Skykomish, WA 98288

RE: Skykomish Ranger District Proposed Trail Projects

Dear District Ranger Neal:

The 19 undersigned conservation, recreation and wildlife organizations strongly support the Blanca Lake Trail relocation and the construction of the Heybrook Ridge Connecting Trail. Both of these projects would maintain and enhance recreational access for residents of Index, Gold Bar, and Skykomish as well as visitors to some of the Skykomish Valley’s most popular and stunning trails. These proposed trail improvements or connections allow for more sustainable recreational use in areas that already provide hiking and other recreational use.

Support for the Blanca Lake Trail Relocation

Blanca Lake is one of the most stunning alpine lakes in the region whose popularity continues to grow as hikers are drawn to its turquoise blue waters and stunning peaks. The outlined improvements would create sustainable access and increased safety for all those who wish to enjoy its beauty. The proposed trail work includes reroutes of switchbacks, would receive tread and drainage work (i.e. native rock or log water bars), rock steps, and native log or rock stairways. Many switchbacks would have native log switchback barriers, utilizing downed logs.

More defined trails will decrease the chances of recreationists going off trail and damaging fragile flora and fauna. The trail improvements will also help to prevent future harmful erosion as well as disperse user pressure, thereby reducing wear and tear on current popular trails. This trail reconstruction would only require cutting an estimated 10 coniferous trees (8”-12” in diameter) with a hand saw for trail structures. The Blanca Lake Trail is within the Wild Sky and Henry M Jackson Wilderness areas. No motorized tools or vehicles are needed to provide these trail improvements.

Support for the Heybrook Ridge Connecting Trail

The Heybrook Ridge trail boasts some of the best views of the Wild Sky Wilderness Area and is popular amongst hikers, birders, and snowshoers. Heybrook Ridge County Park, located adjacent to the town of Index, is the result of a local effort to protect the town’s viewshed from logging several years ago.

The proposed connecting trail would construct approximately 350 feet of natural surfaced hiking trail across Forest Service land to connect the main portion of Heybrook Ridge County Park with its 10-acre “Annex” parcel. This parcel was purchased and donated by the Friends of Heybrook Ridge in 2013. The trail would be built by Snohomish County Parks in conjunction with volunteers from FOHR and Washington Trails Association. It would provide access to an in-process public view site (the “Memory Shelter”) showcasing Canyon Falls and would be constructed by Friends of Heybrook Ridge. No trees larger than 8 inches in diameter would be removed during construction (and these only as needed) and local rock sources could be utilized for construction.

These projects would be contracted out, providing the opportunity for local jobs and would be enhanced with local volunteer labor. These trails provide important economic and social benefits to residents from the towns of Index, Skykomish and Gold Bar and other Sky Valley Communities. Visitors who use the trails, purchase gas, food and lodging in these communities, providing important economic benefits.

In a time where more and more Washingtonians are turning to the outdoors to find peace and escape, it is important now more than ever to maintain and improve the beautiful trails where we play. We urge the US Forest Service to move forward with the Blanca Lake Trail relocation and the construction of the Heybrook Ridge Connecting Trail.

Sincerely,

Tom Uniack
Executive Director
Washington Wild

Rick McGuire
President
Alpine Lakes Protection Society (ALPS)

Ann Darlington
President
Friends of Heybrook Ridge

Joe Sambataro
National Access Dir & Northwest Regional Dir
Access Fund

Kelsey, Ben, Liz & Craig Curran
Owners
Watershed Pub & Kitchen

Phil Fenner
President
North Cascades Conservation Council

Lara Zahaba
Co-Owner | Marketing & Communications
Stoup Brewing

Debbie Copple
Director
Sky Valley Chamber of Commerce

Craig Noble
General Manager
Lighthouse Roasters

Jack Guinn
General Manager/Co-Owner
Hellbent Brewing Company

Art Campbell
President
North Central Washington Audubon Society

Sara Nelson
Co-Founder/Owner
Fremont Brewing Co

Betsy Robblee
Conservation & Advocacy Director
The Mountaineers

Annalise Wille
Co-founder
Women for Wild Lands

Ashley Siple
Board President
Washington Climbers Coalition

Norm Johnson
Mayor
Town of Index, WA

Blair and Kathy Corson
Owner
Outdoor Adventures (Index)

Dave Werntz
Science and Conservation Director
Conservation Northwest

Eddie Espinosa
Nat'l Volunteer Program Sr. Manager
American Alpine Club

CC: Senator Maria Cantwell, Senator Patty Murray, Congresswoman Suzan DelBene