



File Code: 1950

Date: March 18, 2016

Re: 2016-2017 Proposed Projects on the Darrington District

Dear Forest User:

The Forest Service (USFS) and partners are analyzing a number of new projects on the Darrington Ranger District, as well as continuing work on on-going projects. The Forest Service is scoping for issues that the projects' environmental analyses should address. Please provide comments on issues and scope of analysis by April 18, 2016 for the new projects below:

Special Use Permit Project:

1. **Stream Gauging Equipment**-This project would issue a 20-year permit for the Upper Skagit Tribe to install and maintain gauging equipment on stream systems on the Darrington and Mt. Baker Districts. Gauging equipment would be located in T33N, R11E, Section 19 (Tenas Creek) and T36N, R11E, Section 30 (Diobsud Creek).

Vegetation Management Project:

2. **Segelsen Collaborative Vegetation and Aquatic Restoration Project** - This vegetation project with an aquatic component of road drainage restoration is proposed by the Darrington Collaborative Group <http://www.darringtoncollaborative.org/> in second growth stands within the N.F. Stillaguamish River drainage. The project would entail a 70-acre restoration thinning, and a stewardship component of drainage restoration both in the Segelsen area and in the Clear Creek drainage with upgrade of road culverts, ditch and surface conditions. This project is located in: T33N, R09E, Sections 28 & 29 (Segelsen Thin) and T32N, R10E, Section 31, T31N, R10E, Section 6 & 7, T31N, R09E, Sections 12, 13, 23, 24, 27 (Clear Creek Road 2060).
3. **North Zone Huckleberry Enhancement Project** - This project proposes to partner with the Swinomish Indian Tribal Community and Sauk-Suiattle Tribe to enhance huckleberry habitat by removing trees that are encroaching into huckleberry sites. This Darrington District site is located near Tupso Lake, above Grade Creek in Skagit County, approximately 11 miles northeast of Darrington, WA in T33N, R10E, Section 1; and, T33N, R11E, Sections 6 and 7.
4. **Darrington District Blowdown Salvage** - This project would remove blowdown trees at two sites on the Darrington Ranger District: 1) the Mountain Loop at the Old Sauk Trailhead and 2) the Suiattle Road 25. The project area is located on the Darrington District in T31N, R10E, Section 9, and in T32N, R11E, Section 8, northeast of Darrington

Recreation Project:

5. **Buck Creek Campground Restoration Project** - This project would restore riparian habitat where a logjam rerouted stream flow into campsites on the West side of Buck Creek campground and would upgrade campsites on the East side of Buck Creek campground to compensate for sites loss to the storm damage. The project area is located on the Darrington District in T32N, R11E, Section 13 northeast of Darrington.

Road and Trail Work:

6. **Storm Damage Repairs** - This project would repair storm damaged trails and roads on the Darrington District as funding is available. Trails with currently inventoried damage from the winter storms include: Old Sauk Trail, White Chuck Bench Trail, Beaver Lake Trail, and Big



Four Trail Bridge abutments. Roads with currently inventoried storm damage include: the Mt. Loop Rd #20, Tenas Creek Rd #2660, Goodman Rd #2081, Falls Creek Rd #2080, N.F. Stillaguamish Rd #28, Rinker Ridge Rd #29, Gordon Creek Bridge Rd # 4037, Deer Creek Rd # 4052, Coal Lake Rd # 4060, Sunrise Mine Rd # 4065 and S.F. Canyon Cr. /Tupso Pass Rd # 41. The project work is located throughout the Darrington District.

Research and Data Collection:

- 7. Glacier Peak Data Collection:** This project would issue a special use permit for the US Geological Survey (USGS) to install Global Positioning System (GPS) antennas at two headwater streams of Glacier Peak, and collect geophysical core samples around Glacier Peak. Data collection would be located in Glacier Peak Wilderness on the Darrington District in T30N, R14E, Section 3 (Dusty Creek) and Section 11(Chocolate Creek) upper Suiattle River, lower White Chuck River, and near the summit area of Glacier Peak. This project is proposed as a joint project of USGS Cascade Volcano Observatory, the USGS Washington Water Science Center and the Sauk-Suiattle Indian Tribe.

The following section of this letter lists the purpose and need for each of the proposed actions, a brief project description, with the name and phone number of the project leader or USFS liaison. Maps of the projects (Figure 1 to Figure 5) with the location of the proposed actions are attached.

1. Stream Gauging Equipment- Chris Stewart, North Zone hydrologist 360-856-2634, Figure 1

Purpose and Need: There is need for monitoring information that provides data as a basis for natural resource decisions, and for the provision of localized information which can detect changes in ecological systems. There is also a need to respond to the Upper Skagit Tribe request for a special use permit as per Forest Plan direction for land uses. "The Forest Plan directs the FS to be responsive in the consideration of the use and occupancy of the Forest by private individuals, Federal, State, and local governments when such use is consistent with Forest management objectives, is in the public interest, and cannot be reasonably served by development on private land" (4-137). Special use evaluation, permit issuance, fees, and administration will be in accordance with FS Manual 2700, as revised and 36 CFR 251."

Proposed Action: This project would issue a 20-year permit for the Upper Skagit Tribe to install and maintain gauging equipment on Skagit River tributary stream systems of the Mt. Baker and Darrington Districts. The stations would be located on an existing bridge structure at Tenas Creek, and bolted to a rock within the stream corridor at Diobsud Creek. The installations are scheduled for 2016.

NEPA Document: CE under 36 CFR 220.6(e)(3) *Approval, modification or continuation of minor special uses of NFS lands that require less than 5 contiguous acres of land.* Decision Date: April, 2016

2. Segelsen Collaborative Vegetation and Aquatic Restoration Project - Peter Forbes, District Liaison, 360-436-2301 Figure 2

Purpose and Need: There is a need for forest stands that contribute to meeting desired conditions as per the standards provided in the Forest Land Management Plan (as amended). There is also a need for road systems to meet appropriate road maintenance standards consistent with Aquatic Conservation Objectives.

Proposed Action: This project would implement a stewardship project of second-growth thinning with drainage enhancements both in the Segelsen area and in Clear Creek (Road 2060) as part of stewardship contracting. The project would thin densely stocked, homogeneous second growth stands that originated following clear-cutting and planting approximately 55 years ago. The proposed variable density thinning would promote the development of old-forest characteristics and functions, including large trees with complex crowns, a multistory canopy, and a diverse understory plant community.

This project would also implement aquatic restoration work in the Clear Creek drainage with road improvements of culvert upgrades, ditch clean-up, and improved road surfacing. Clear Creek was

selected for drainage restoration due to heavy recreational use* and work needed to meet appropriate road maintenance standards consistent with Aquatic Conservation Objectives. Forest Service roads 2060 & 2065 have developed large pot holes, erosion and scour channels. Road ditches have filled in many places, lost capacity and now allow water to flow over the road and erode the surfacing. This project would restore hydrologic flow patterns across the slope by bringing the targeted road system up to standards, and minimizing potential road system impacts on Clear Creek and tributary streams.

**Clear Creek Road accesses several popular rock climbing areas (Witch Doctor Wall, Exfoliation Dome, Green Giant Buttress and practice routes), 3 different hiking destinations (Squire Creek Pass, Deer Creek Pass & Copper Creek trail), fishing access to Clear Creek, general exploring/scenic view driving and hunting/gathering/dispersed camping). It is also popular for winter Nordic skiing & snowshoeing.*

The project is located in the Segelsen area, north of the town of Darrington, and within the Clear Creek drainage, approximately 5 miles southeast of the Town of Darrington.

NEPA Document: Categorical Exclusion under 36 CFR 220.6(e)(12): *Harvest of live trees not to exceed 70 acres (not for even-aged regeneration)*
Decision Date: July 2016

3. North Zone Huckleberry Enhancement - Phyllis Reed, Wildlife Biologist 360-436-2332, Figure 1

Purpose and Need: There is a need for retention of desired vegetation on the landscape. The big-leaf huckleberry is an important food source for both wildlife, and people with big-leaf huckleberry a traditional and cultural resource to tribes. Big-leaf huckleberry patches have been encroached on by adjacent tree growth and the amount of area in productive berry patches reduced.

Proposed Action: The proposed action is to remove small diameter conifers by thinning existing huckleberry stands so the remaining live-tree canopy covers less than 30% of the project area. Treatment would occur in two stands, totaling 29 acres in the mountain hemlock and Pacific silver fir zones on Tupso Ridge of the Darrington RD. Treatments would occur in stands less than 30 years of age, with 2 different cut tree disposal methods: 1) lop and scatter; and, 2) pile and burn. The two project sites are historic huckleberry collection sites identified as high priority for vegetation management.

NEPA Document: Categorical Exclusion under 36 CFR 220.6 (e)(6): Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities....
Decision Date: April 2016

4. Blowdown Salvage -Peter Forbes, District Ranger & Liaison, 360-436-2301 Figures 2 and 3

Purpose and Need: There is a need to maintain forest health and resiliency to meet desired conditions of the Forest Land Management Plan (as amended)). Winter storms resulted in blown down trees across the District, including patches along the Mountain Loop Scenic By-way at the Old Sauk trailhead (approximately 1 acre) and along Road 25 (totaling approximately 10 acres). Partial salvage is proposed to meet visual management objectives, access needs, and reduce concentrations of down material which would harbor bark beetles. In the 2015 annual reconnaissance for forest pathogens, there was a sharp increase in the number of trees killed by Douglas-fir bark beetle across the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie Forest and Darrington District, compared to other years. These beetles are attracted to fresh blowdown and reproduce in down material, with offspring later emerging to attack nearby trees. Salvage of timber would remove beetle host material and reduce the risk of bark beetle infestation in the surrounding area.

Proposed Action: This project would remove a portion of the blowdown trees at the Old Sauk trailhead (<1 acre) and along Road 25 in the Suiattle River drainage near Conrad Creek (<5 acres), while retaining down wood in the riparian areas, and within the salvaged area. The blowdown salvage is proposed by DARA (a division of Darrington Strong - <http://www.darringtonstrong.org/divisions/darrington-strong-divisions/darrington-area-resource-advocates>) as a potential stewardship contracting project with options for trail work or other restoration work. The project would be accomplished via small commercial sales that would utilize access from current road systems, with ground based logging equipment used at the Old Sauk trailhead and cable logging equipment used at the Suiattle site.

NEPA Document: Categorical Exclusion under 36 CFR 220.6(e)(13): *Salvage of dead or dying trees not to exceed 250 acres,*
Decision Date: July 2016

5. Buck Creek Campground Restoration - Stella Torres, 360-436-2316, Figure 2

Purpose and Need: There is a need for retaining recreation opportunities in the Suiattle drainage and for the retention of spatial distribution of peak flows which deliver sediment, nutrients and wood routing. Recent flooding events and storm damage severely impacted several campsites at Buck Creek Campground where a logjam has shifted the creek into some sites and the campground roadway.

Project Action: This project would enhance riparian conditions on the west side of Buck Creek with the removal of damaged tent pads, picnic tables, and grills, and would shift camping activities to the dispersed recreation sites on the east side of the creek. Approximately 4-6 campsites would be improved on the east side of Buck Creek while the sites on the west side in the high water floodplain would be decommissioned.

NEPA Document: Categorical Exclusion under 36 CFR 220.6(d)(5): *Repair and maintenance of recreation sites and facilities*
Decision Date: April 2016

6. Road and trail storm repairs - contact Santino Pascua, Roads Manager, 425-888-8784 and Bridget Wisniewski, Trails Leader, 360-436-2339 Figures 1 to 4

Purpose and Need: There is a need for safe public access to NFS Lands. Heavy rains during the winter of 2015/2016 resulted in storm damage to trails and roads. The purpose of this project is to repair damaged sites to reestablish safe travel on the District trail and road system.

Proposed Action: This project would move provide a variety of treatments at damaged trail sites including trail tread repair and reconstruction of trail sections. Road repairs includes a variety of treatments to open roads and restore drainage patterns. Road treatments include, but are not limited to: removing slide debris, culvert and ditch clean-out, culvert upgrades, drainage improvements, reconstruction of road segments, shifts of roads into the adjacent hillside, replacement of embankment failures with armored walls, and replacement of lost aggregate.

NEPA Document: Categorical Exclusion under 36 CFR 220.6(d)(4): *Repair and maintenance of roads, trails, and landline boundaries.*
Decision Date: April 2016

7. Glacier Peak Data Collection - contact Eric Ozog, Realty Specialist, 360-691-4396, Figure 5

Purpose and Need: There is need for data collection that provides the basis for natural resource decisions, and for the provision of localized information which can detect changes in ecological systems. There is also a need to respond to the USGS request for a special use permit as per Forest Plan direction for land uses. The USGS, in collaboration with partners, is studying river hydraulics, sediment transport in rivers from the mountains to the ocean, the role of large wood in influencing river shape, impacts on the aquatic ecology and fish in rivers, and how river flooding worsens or improves over time, and is also gathering information to improve understanding of the eruptive history of the Glacier Peak volcano. Data collection would assist in the management of the Forest wilderness areas and the downstream communities, especially as it relates to public safety.

Proposed Action: This project would issue a special use permit for the USGS to install temporary Global Positioning Systems (GPS) antenna at two headwater stream systems of Glacier Peak and collect geophysical core samples needed for seismic monitoring of the volcano. The GPS antennas would be delivered on site by helicopter, with ground crews walking to the sites. The antennas would be in place for up to two weeks and then flown out by helicopter. The core sample collection would require the use of a small gas powered coring drill to retrieve approximately ten cores at each of eight sites. The cores are 1 inch in diameter and three inches long. Crews would carry the drill to the sites on foot and carry core samples out. The data collection is tentatively scheduled to begin in the summer of 2016.

NEPA Document: CE under 7 CFR 1b.3(a)(7): *Inventories, research activities, and studies such as resource inventories and data collection when such activities are clearly limited in context and intensity.*

Decision Date: July 2016

The proposed actions fall within categories that may exclude them from documentation in an environmental assessment or environmental impact statement. Those projects currently have no identified extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed actions and they are within categories listed in 36 CFR 220.6 (d) and (e). The decisions for projects fitting within CFR categorical exclusions would have a categorical exclusion letter signed by the District Ranger as the Responsible Official, or be documented in Decision Memos, also signed by the District Ranger or Forest Supervisor.

Information on the projects is posted on the Forest web at www.fs.usda.gov/goto/mbs/projects . If you have comments on these proposed actions, please submit them to Phyllis Reed by April 18, 2016 at the above address, phone 360-436-2332, email: plreed@fs.fed.us. Comments received in response to this invitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be part of the Project Record and available for public review.

We appreciate your continued interest in the management of the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest.

Sincerely,



PETER R FORBES
District Ranger

On-going Projects:

District Campground and Trailhead Clean-up – contact Stella Torres, Project Leader, 360-436-2316

This project continues recreational site clean-up across the District with emphasis on removal of hazard trees in Sulphur Creek and Buck Creek campgrounds and Downey Creek trailhead and camping area after limited access in the area following flood damage to the main road. The assessment of hazard trees uses the *2014 Guide for Hazard-Tree Identification and Mitigation on Developed Sites in Oregon and Washington Forests. R6-NR-TP-021-2013. USDA Forest Service, Forest Health Protection, Pacific Northwest Region, Portland, OR.* Hazard tree salvage includes utilization of down wood in aquatic restoration projects.

The project would also upgrade campsites on the East side of Buck Creek campground to compensate for campsites loss to storm damage and logjam reroute of stream flow into campsites on the West side of Buck Creek campground. This project is located along Road 26 in the Suiattle River drainage at approximately MP 14.5, and MP 20 in 32N, R11E, Section 15, and in T32N, R12E, Sections 14 and 24, northeast of Darrington.

Darrington District Road Maintenance – contact Santino Pascua, Roads Manager, 425-888-8784

Maintenance activities include brushing, surface blading, slide removal, culvert cleaning, addition of needed ditch relief culverts, ditch cleaning, fill stabilization, pavement patching, cutting out of downed trees, hazard tree removal, gate and bridge maintenance and road closure, shoulder maintenance, and spot rocking. Culverts which have exceeded their useful lives and/or are of concern for bedload transport, 100-yr flows, or fish passage, will be considered for replacement. Exact locations will be determined as other work occurs. The extent of road work is limited by the amount of road maintenance funding provided in any one year.

Darrington District Trail Maintenance – contact Bridget Wisniewski, Trails program, 360-436-2339

Trails are also being checked as snow melts for damage from winter conditions. Trail maintenance and repair would occur on trails, especially heavy-use trails, and continued on-going improvement projects. Trail maintenance would include the log removal, brushing and drainage work such as the improvement of the Suiattle River Trail, replacement of footings and decking on the Ice Cave Boardwalk, improvement of the stream crossing on the Mt. Pilchuck Lookout Trail and additional work on the Pacific Crest Trail and other District trails.