

Spring Trail Closure

January 25, 2012



OKANOGAN-WENATCHEE NATIONAL FOREST
NACHES RANGER DISTRICT
10237 U.S. HIGHWAY 12
NACHES, WA 98937
509-653-1400

Preventing Resource Damage and Upholding Trail Quality

Seasonal weather patterns are indicative of how much precipitation falls along the eastern slopes of the Cascades. During the months of March, April, May, and June- spring rains combine with melting snow and contribute to the maximum saturation capability of the soil. This time of year also brings forest users out of the house to begin hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, motor biking, and off-road riding. Heavy use on saturated dirt trails can lead to **rutting, erosion, and other damage**. Spring damage also can add to the backlog of annual trail maintenance.

Users brought this continuing issue to the attention of the Naches Ranger District recreation staff managers, resource specialists, and District Ranger. In response, Naches sought out a way to both prevent resource damage and more effectively manage and maintain the trail systems. The result of these conversations was a Forest Order closure (Okanogan-Wenatchee No. 733, 2011) on early season motorized use on Naches Ranger District motorized trails.

Off Highway Vehicle (OHV) Rangers, trails managers, local law enforcement, volunteers, and other members of the public saw positive affects of the early season trail closure. The closure also became an education opportunity for users to understand proper trail use and the environmental impacts of erosion. The success of the closure was attributed to the **volunteer groups** who both assisted in spreading the word while also completing miles of trail maintenance.

Instead of relying on an annual Forest Order, the Naches Ranger District is proposing to complete an environmental analysis of a Categorical Exclusion (CE). This proposal would close **all the motorized trails** (Jeep, ATV, and Single-tread Motorcycle) **to all uses** every spring season. This CE will result in an environmental and social analysis and will evaluate trail conditions, seasonal variations, trail reports, and federal guidelines.

The Naches Ranger District is asking the public to review the proposed action and provide constructive feedback. We hope to have a dialogue on how we can all best manage our trails with the resources we have.

Differences from Last Year's Closure:

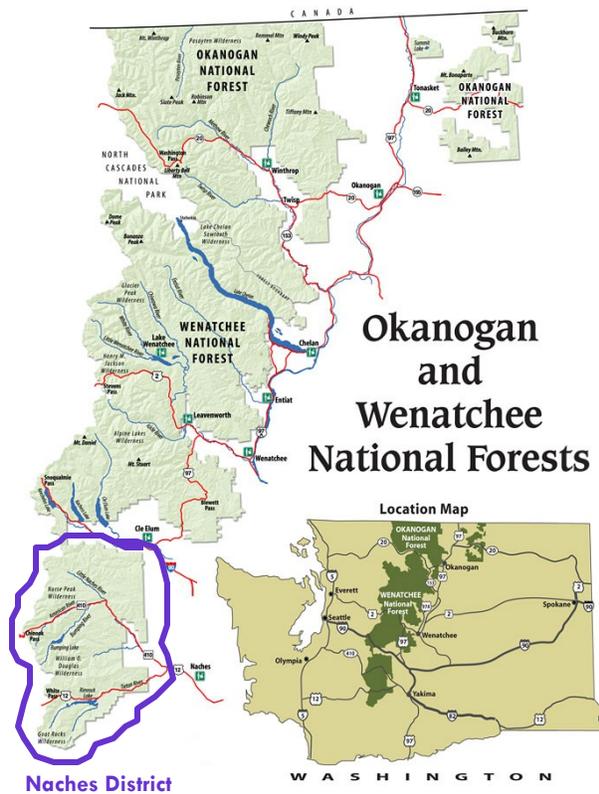
- THIS PROPOSED ACTION WOULD ENABLE AN ANNUAL SEASONAL CLOSURE WITHOUT AN ADDITIONAL FOREST ORDER
- MOTORIZED TRAILS WOULD BE CLOSED TO ALL USERS, NOT JUST MOTORIZED USERS
- TRAIL CLOSURE DATE COULD BE FLEXIBLE AS NEEDED BASED ON CONDITIONS, SEASONAL VARIATIONS, AND SPECIALISTS REPORTS

Project Objectives

- Minimize spring trail damage on motorized trails to maintain trail and soil quality.
- Maintain motorized trail system with limited maintenance capabilities.
- Provide a quality riding experience on open motorized trails.
- Continue to monitor recreational use and impacts on motorized trails and develop necessary mitigation measures.
- Educate public users on trail maintenance, trail misuse, and impacts of soil erosion.
- Continue positive relationship with volunteer and recreational user groups through clear communication and ongoing partnerships.



Naches Trail Crew clearing trail.



Spring Trail Closure

Project Location

The project Area will consist of the entire Naches Ranger District. Wilderness areas are excluded from this analysis as they contain no motorized trails. The Naches Ranger District is the southern most district on the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest within Yakima County, Washington State.

Many people travel to Naches from the Westside of the State over White Pass on U.S Highway 12 or Chinook Pass on WA State Highway 410. The district is roughly 20 miles west of the city of Naches.

Proposed Action

- **Seasonal Spring Closure on all Naches Ranger District Motorized Trails:** date of closure and opening would be tentatively April 1-June 1 annually.
- **Determination of closing and opening:** dates would be flexible depending on weather and trail conditions.
- **Enforcement:** for proper enforcement there is a need to maintain an interactive public website, update district trails information, have both OPEN and CLOSED trail signage, actively use email and mailing lists for current news, and provide extra signage and mapping at multiple locations on the district.
- Allow for **volunteers** to perform maintenance before official trail opening
- **Continue to research and explore the** impacts of all types of recreational use and how to better manage trail systems.
- **Monitoring and adaptive management** to make necessary adjustments to closure.

Project Consistency

The objectives of the proposed Spring Trail Closure are consistent with recommendations present in relevant national and regional direction. The project will follow direction for land and habitat management areas as per the Wenatchee National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (1990) as amended by the Northwest Forest Plan Standards and Guidelines for Management of Habitat for Late Successional and Old-Growth Forest Related Species within the Range of the Northern spotted-owl (1994). This project will decrease the chance of trail erosion and will meet the objectives of the Aquatic Conservation Strategy.

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the project is classified as a Categorical Exclusion (CE) 36 CFR 220.6(d)(1) reading “Prohibitions to provide short-term resource protection or to protect public health and safety”. The CE document will summarize the project's purpose and will analyze the potential effects of the project on the built and natural environment. As part of the Endangered Species Act consultation process, a Biological Assessment will also be completed for each project.

Timelines

Public Comment Period: There is no official public comment period, however, comments would be most helpful if received by February 25, 2012.

Decision Memo: The Naches Ranger District hopes to have a signed decision by February 28, 2012.

Trail Closure: *Tentative* April 1.

Trail Opening: *Tentative* June 1.



Blower Clearing Snow at Chinook Pass on June 11, 2011.

How to Comment

The Naches Ranger District is still in the planning process for this project. Substantive public input is a necessary piece of a quality NEPA document. To learn more about how to utilize the NEPA process as a member of the public, visit: http://ceq.hss.doe.gov/nepa/Citizens_Guide_Dec07.pdf . Your personal knowledge of this area can help the planning team identify additional issues and opportunities not previously defined within this document.

Additional information about the Spring Trail Closure can be obtained by contacting Michelle King at (509) 653-1420, Monday through Friday during normal business hours.

Official Comments

Address to:

Michelle King, NEPA Planner
Naches Ranger District
10237 U.S. Highway 12
Naches, WA 98937

or Email to:

comments-pacificnorthwest-wenatchee-naches@fs.fed.us

**WANT TO STAY
UPDATED ON THIS
PROJECT AND
OTHER DISTRICT
PROJECTS?**

Contact Michelle King
at
(509) 653-1420 or
mdking02@fs.fed.us
and join the Naches
Ranger District mailing

Thank you for your assistance.
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Irene L. Davidson".

IRENE L. DAVIDSON
District Ranger



Conrad Meadows, Naches Ranger District June 2011.