

**File Code:** 1950

**Date:** September 30, 2024

Dear Interested Citizens, Partners, and Stakeholders,

The USDA Forest Service, Gifford Pinchot National Forest, is preparing an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), for the Spirit Lake Outflow Safety Improvement Project (Project) and we are seeking your input during this formal project scoping period. Spirit Lake is located within the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest, about 52 miles northeast of Portland, Oregon. The purpose and need for the Project is to provide for the safety of downstream communities by reducing the risk of flooding and mudflows from a failure of the Spirit Lake debris blockage that was created during the 1980 eruption of Mt St Helens. Shortly afterwards, a tunnel was constructed from Spirit Lake to the South Coldwater Creek drainage and currently provides for safe lake level management. The tunnel has some level of risk for failure due to the construction under emergency conditions and its location in an area of active volcanic, geologic, hydrologic, and seismic hazards.

The Forest Service is requesting comments on potential options for future lake level management under more reliable scenarios, potential environmental and socio/political impacts of the project, and identification of any additional information, studies, or analyses concerning impacts that could affect the quality of the human environment. We request your comments by November 15, 2024. If you do not reply by that date, we will assume that you have no comments at this stage of project development.

The Forest Service has conducted a feasibility assessment and identified some potential options for future long-term lake level management and outflow improvement that include: A) constructing an open outlet channel, with the redundant measure of rehabilitating the existing outlet tunnel; B) rehabilitating the existing outlet tunnel in shear zones (areas in volcanic tuffs decomposed to weak rock and swelling clays), with the redundant measure of lake storage based on an updated maximum safe lake level; C) constructing a new pressure tunnel parallel to the existing tunnel, with a redundant measure of continued operation of the existing outlet tunnel; D) rehabilitating the existing outlet tunnel in shear zones, with a redundant measure of a buried conduit through the debris blockage that would be large enough to function as a passive emergency spillway; E) converting the existing tunnel into a pressure tunnel, with the redundant measure of lake storage based on an updated maximum safe lake level; and F) constructing a new outlet tunnel and intake parallel to the existing tunnel, with redundant measure of lake storage based on an updated maximum safe lake level as well as potential use of the existing outlet tunnel for backup water level management. These options are a starting point and may change based on your input and future analyses.

The Notice of Intent (NOI) contains the purpose and need for the project as well as potential alternatives. To view the NOI and related project information, visit the project website at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=66482>.

To reduce paper use, the Forest is emphasizing electronic documentation. The project website will be the primary avenue through which the Forest Service will provide information about the Project.



Scoping comments can be submitted electronically through the project website: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=66482>. Once on the website, under “Get Connected,” click on the link for “Comment/Object on Project.”

Electronic comments must be in one of the following formats: email message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), Word (.doc) or (.docx), or Adobe (.pdf). Written comments may be mailed to:

Kelsey Jolley, Spirit Lake NEPA Coordinator  
Re: Spirit Lake Outflow Safety Improvement Project  
987 McClellan Road  
Vancouver, WA 98661

An in-person public scoping meeting will be held at:

Cowlitz County Event Center  
1900 7th Avenue  
Longview, WA  
from 4:00 to 8:00 pm on Wednesday October 23, 2024.

Written and oral comments will also be accepted during the October 23, 2024 scoping meeting. Thank you for your interest in the Spirit Lake Outflow Safety Improvement Project. Additional information can be provided by contacting the Spirit Lake NEPA Coordinator, Kelsey Jolley at [SM.FS.SpiritLake@usda.gov](mailto:SM.FS.SpiritLake@usda.gov) or visiting the projects general website at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/detailfull/giffordpinchot/landmanagement/?cid=fseprd1004094>

Sincerely,



JOHANNA KOVARIK  
Forest Supervisor