



File Code: 1950

Date: January 28, 2013

Dear National Forest User:

The Snoqualmie Ranger District of the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest (Forest Service), in partnership with Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust (Greenway Trust) has initiated National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) environmental analysis for two trail projects, Middle Fork Trail #1003 Relocation (mile post (MP) 3.04 to 3.83) and Pratt Bar Trail Construction (see project descriptions below). This letter is a notice of the opportunity to comment on these projects.

Middle Fork Trail #1003 Relocation and Pratt Bar Trail Projects are located on National Forest System (NFS) lands within the Middle Fork Snoqualmie River watershed. Legal descriptions for these projects are T24N, R10E, SW ¼ Section 25, SE ¼ SE ¼ Section 26, and NE ¼ NW ¼ Section 36 (Middle Fork Trail Relocation) and T24N, R10E, SE ¼ Section 30 (Pratt Bar Trail) (See attached project maps).

The Forest Service is combining the scoping period with the notice and comment period into one 30-day public comment period on project Proposed Actions, as provided by 36 CFR 215.5 regulations.

The Forest Service expects to document the decision on these two projects in a Categorical Exclusion, under 36 CFR 220.6(e) (1), category (1), construction and reconstruction of trails. In light of a recent court ruling (Sequoia ForestKeeper v. Tidwell, 11-cv-00679-LJO-DLB (E.D. Cal.)), the Forest Service will provide public notice, comment, and opportunity for administrative appeal for projects and activities documented with a Decision Memo until new instructions are issued by the Washington Office, or the Agency issues regulations addressing the Court's ruling. Only those who provide comment or express interest in this proposal during this comment period will be eligible to appeal the decision pursuant to 36 CFR 215 regulations. The applicant will also have the option to appeal under separate 36 CFR part 251 appeal regulations.

### **Middle Fork Trail #1003 Relocation Project**

**Background:** The Middle Fork Trail between MP 3.04 & MP 3.34 (about 1,600 feet) contains a damaged bridge, six deteriorated puncheon, two locations where the river channel has substantially removed the trail during recent and past flood high water events, and a large sinkhole into which the trail has collapsed. This sinkhole is not currently passable by pack and saddle (stock).

#### **Proposed Action:**

**Existing Trail between MP 3.04 and MP 3.34** This section of the Middle Fork Trail is approximately 1,600 feet in length and contains a damaged bridge, six deteriorated puncheon, two locations where the river channel has substantially removed the trail, and a large sinkhole into which the trail has collapsed. The sinkhole is not passable by stock.

This section of trail would be decommissioned and all traffic routed onto the proposed trail relocation route. Decommissioning would include removal of a 32 foot trail bridge (one beam is broken) and six segments of puncheon totaling approximately 174 feet. The trail would be covered and visually obscured with large woody debris and mulch to make it unappealing for



travel and to promote natural regeneration of vegetation. Past experience has shown that this method of trail rehabilitation is effective in reducing the potential for soil disturbance and to permanently obscure trails that are being rehabilitated.

**Existing Trail between MP 3.34 and MP 3.60:** This section of trail provides trail users with the only access to river gravel bars and includes some of the best view locations along the trail. It is also one of the few locations suitable for dispersed camping between Taylor River and Dingford Creek. The trail tread is in good condition and is not threatened by the river. This section of trail is about 1,370 feet in length. It would be maintained in its present condition.

**Existing Trail between MP 3.60 and MP 3.83:** This section of the Middle Fork Trail has been washed away at approximately MP 3.60 by the Middle Fork Snoqualmie River. It is also threatened at MPs 3.74 and 3.81 by a large landslide and continued ground settling. There is also a deteriorating section of puncheon (about 104 feet) and three steep switchbacks located in the 1,215 trail segment.

This segment of trail would be decommissioned, and all traffic routed onto the proposed trail relocation. Decommissioning would include removing puncheon and installing several waterbars to control run-off and soil erosion. The trail would be covered and visually obscured with large woody debris and mulch to make it unappealing for travel and to promote natural regeneration of vegetation.

**New Trail Location between MP 3.04 & MP 3.83:** The relocated Middle Fork Trail, as indicated on the attached map, would contour across the slope, utilizing a natural bench above the Middle Fork Snoqualmie River. Drier ground would be utilized, but puncheon and turnpikes would be installed at several areas, mostly at the beginning of this segment of relocated trail. Turns would be installed as climbing turns suitable for mountain bikes. A trail junction would be installed at Station 10+00 (see map) to create a spur trail that provides access to MP 3.34 to MP 3.60. The new section of trail would be approximately 3,140 feet in length.

**New Trail Spur Location linking 10+00 to MP 3.34:** This new trail location, as indicated on the attached map would provide access to Middle Fork Snoqualmie River gravel bars, view sites and dispersed camping found between MP 3.34 and MP 3.60. This new trail spur also maintains access to a river ford used periodically by maintenance crews to access work along the trail.

The new trail spur would contour slopes and utilize drier ground where possible. Puncheon would be utilized to cross several wet areas. The section of trail would be about 1,250 feet in length.

**Rehabilitation:** Abandoned sections of trail would be restored as much as the budget will allow.

- Trails will be visually obscured, using clearing debris from trail construction and other down material in the surrounding area.
- Material shall be placed perpendicular to the existing trail in order to act as a retaining structure or as a drainage structure.
- Existing water bars and any other drainage structures will be left in place.

**Mobilization & Construction:** Standard trail and design techniques would be used if lacustrine (clay) soils (as well as other sensitive soils) are encountered. Techniques include the installation of puncheon, turnpike, drainage ditches, and native-borrow or imported gravel surfacing. The decision on the type of appropriate trail structure would be made on a site-specific basis. The final design of these trail sections may include quantities of all of the above

**Purpose and Need:** Portions of this segment of trail have washed out. There is a need for safe hiker, mountain bike and pack and saddle trail access between MP 3.04 and 3.83.



## **Pratt Bar Trail Construction Project**

**Background:** The proposed trail project is located on NFS lands between the Middle Fork Road (~ MP 8.9) and the Middle Fork Snoqualmie River (~RM 61.5). The trail would access a large gravel bar located on the north side of the Middle Fork Snoqualmie River just upriver from its confluence with the Pratt River. The gravel bar commonly known as the Pratt Bar or Pratt Gravel Bar has been recreationally important for many years. Day campers frequent dispersed sites at the Bar, which is also destination for anglers. An old road grade leading from the Middle Fork Road was drivable until the 1980's. The old road is blocked with rocks and ecology blocks. This road is also closed by a stream washout near its junction with the Middle Fork Road (see attached map). Seedling, sapling and pole size red alder trees and bushes are encroaching into the road surface.

Prior to construction of the Middle Fork Trail Bridge at the Middle Fork Trailhead and construction of the connector trail to the Pratt (currently under construction), hikers and stock forded and accessed Pratt River Trail #1035 from the gravel bar. In the 1970's the Middle Fork River was crossed via a trail suspension bridge and a low water ford just north of the bar provided stock access. This bridge washed out in approximately 1979.

**Proposed Action:** The project would improve the current non-motorized hiker recreational access to the Pratt Gravel Bar. This would be accomplished by converting about 1,100 feet of closed non-system road to a Forest Service system trail. A 35-40 foot bridge, with ramp on south end would be constructed to cross the unnamed creek at the beginning of the trail (See attached map). The project would also include installation of a toilet and trailhead sign amenities in the existing parking area, which will be improved and paved by the approved Federal Highway Administration Middle Fork Road Project, scheduled for construction between summer 2013 and 2016.

Because the trail would be located on an old road bed, only minimal excavation would be necessary. No boardwalks or puncheon would be required.

In general, construction would include brushing and upgrading drainage (as needed) on the old road grade. As stated above, it would also require the construction of a 35-40 trail bridge across an unnamed stream at the beginning of the project.

**Purpose and Need:** The Middle Fork Snoqualmie River watershed holds great potential as a recreational destination for the Seattle metropolitan area. Located only a 45 minute drive on I-90 from downtown Seattle, this valley has been the focus of intense public acquisition, cleanup, and planning for the past 20 years. The Snoqualmie Ranger District and partners have been working under the guidance of the Forest Plan and 1997 Middle Fork Snoqualmie River Public Use Concept Plan to collaboratively restore the valley and improve public access. As Identified in the Concept Plan, there is a need for safe and improved hiker access to the Pratt gravel bar.

**How to Comment and Timeframe:** Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, oral, and electronic comments concerning this action will be accepted for 30 calendar days following publication of this notice in the Snoqualmie Valley Record. If the scoping and comment time period expires on a Saturday, Sunday, or Federal holiday, comments are due by the end of the next Federal working day. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this analysis. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. The regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period. It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period. Only those who provide comment or express interest in this proposal during this comment period will be eligible to appeal the decision pursuant to the 36 CFR part 215 regulations.

If you choose to comment, please submit or hand-deliver your written comments to Jim Franzel, District Ranger, Snoqualmie Ranger District, Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, 902 S.E. North Bend Way, Bldg 1, North Bend, WA 98045. Comments may also be sent by fax to (425) 888-1910, or by e-mail to:



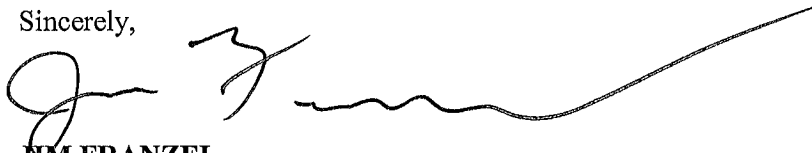
[comments-pacificnorthwest-mtbaker-snoqualmie-snoqualmie@fs.fed.us](mailto:comments-pacificnorthwest-mtbaker-snoqualmie-snoqualmie@fs.fed.us). Electronic comments must be submitted in a readable format such as an e-mail message, plain text (.txt), rich text format (.rtf), Word (.doc), or portable document format (.pdf). In cases where no identifiable name is attached to a comment, a verification of identity will be required for appeal eligibility. If using an electronic message, a scanned signature is one such way. Office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are 8:00 am to 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. Oral comments may be provided at the Responsible Official's office during normal business hours via telephone (425) 8888-8751 or in person.

Comments received in response to this letter, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be part of the Project Record and available for public review.

For additional information, please contact project leader Steve Johnson at (360) 802-5313, or [stevenljohnson@fs.fed.us](mailto:stevenljohnson@fs.fed.us).

We appreciate your continued interest in the management of the Snoqualmie Ranger District.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jim Franzel', written over a horizontal line.

**JIM FRANZEL**

*Snoqualmie District Ranger*

Enclosures



Figure 1. Middle Fork Trail Relocation Project (MP 3.04-3.83) - T24N, R10E, SW ¼ Section 25, SE ¼ SE ¼ Section 26, and NE ¼ NW ¼ Section 36

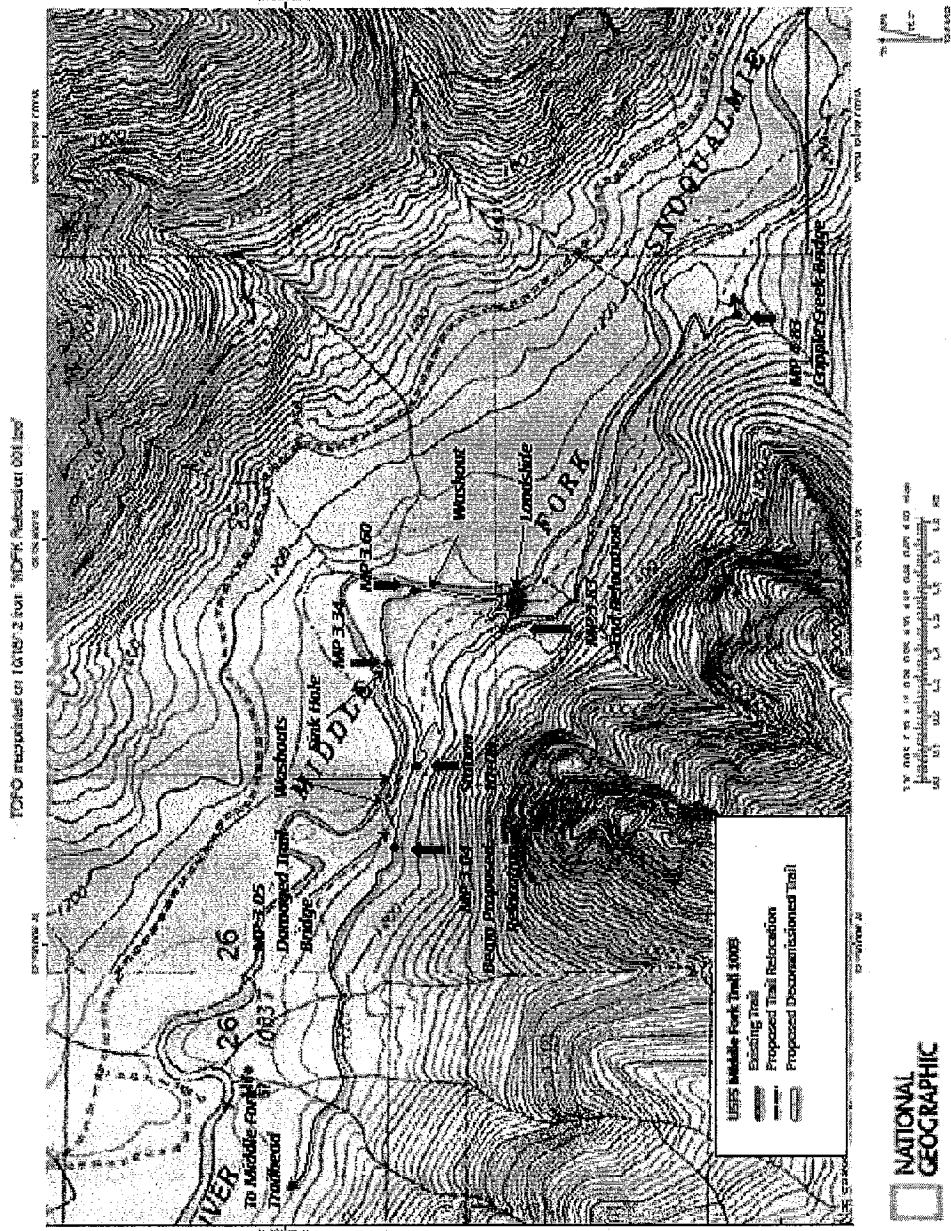


Figure 2. Pratt Bar Trail Construction Project - T24N, R10E, SE ¼ of Section 30

