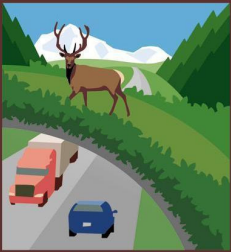


I-90

WILDLIFE BRIDGES

COALITION



**SAFE PASSAGE
HYAK TO EASTON**

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April 19, 2006

James Boynton, Forest Supervisor
Wenatchee National Forest
215 Melody Lane
Wenatchee, WA 98801

Re: I-90 Wildlife Connectivity in the Forest Plan Revision

Dear Supervisor Boynton,

As you develop the revision of the Forest Plan for the Wenatchee National Forest, the I-90 Wildlife Bridges Coalition wishes to provide some input on the important area surrounding Interstate 90. That area between Snoqualmie Pass and Easton is a key corridor for wildlife, connecting the north and south Cascades, used by more than 200 species of vertebrates. Maintaining and enhancing that corridor requires both specialized crossing structures for the freeway and sufficient high quality habitat on the surrounding lands. That will require more explicit management direction for national forest lands in the vicinity.

As you know, we have worked closely with the Forest Service to secure effective wildlife crossing structures in the I-90 Snoqualmie Pass East Project. It now appears that the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) will be investing substantial resources into connectivity measures between Gold Creek and Kachess River, including the installation of crossing structures at more than a dozen locations. The Forest Service has been instrumental in obtaining the needed facilities, and contributing to the scientific knowledge of wildlife needs guiding this project. The long term success of these crossing structures, and overall health of wildlife species in the Central Cascades is dependent on the coordination of efforts of invested organizations and agencies in the vicinity. Scientific studies reveal that *it is imperative that there be sufficient habitat adjacent to these structures, and in the corridors leading to them.* Those lands are primarily national forest lands. We propose that a special designation focused on wildlife connectivity be designated on along I-90. Extending from 1 to 3 miles on either side of the freeway, it would provide clear direction for management of those national forest lands to provide effective wildlife connectivity.

While the Snoqualmie Pass Adaptive Management Area and its Connectivity Emphasis Areas are a start, they apparently do not provide sufficient direction to prevent inappropriate development. The proposed new ski lifts and runs at Hyak Creek is a clear example of where the Forest Service interprets the SPAMA plan to allow cutting and fragmenting of late-successional forests in one of the few remaining upper elevation forest corridors.

The designated Wildlife Connectivity Area would protect existing habitat and restore habitat where possible from the Pass to the vicinity of Easton Ridge/ Big Creek. It would limit additional development to that which is absolutely necessary; provide the best possible habitat corridors leading to the crossing structures; retain selected roads, decommission others; institute seasonal restrictions if needed; promote the acquisition and conservation of key lands; encourage cooperation with other public land managers (e.g., state parks, Bureau of Reclamation, WA Dept of Fish & Wildlife, WSDOT) to improve connectivity; and allow appropriate recreational use, but with a focus on low impact activities.

ADMINISTERED BY

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Alpine Lakes Protection Society
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Kittitas Audubon Society
Northwest Ecosystem Alliance
Seattle Audubon Society
Sierra Club
The Cascades Conservation
Partnership

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Animal Advocates of the Inland NW
Crystal Conservation Coalition
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Center for Tribal Water Advocacy
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Friends of the Carbon River
Gifford Pinchot Task Force
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League of Women Voters of WA
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Summit at Snoqualmie

Accommodating recreational uses in this popular area will be a challenge, as can be seen with the proposed expansion of the ski areas at the summit. Both summer and winter recreation activities need to be reviewed where they are near habitat corridors, especially near crossing structures. The national forest must make allowances for facilities on other ownerships, such as the existing snoparks at Gold Creek, Hyak, Crystal Springs, and Cabin Creek. Every effort must be made to mitigate their impact on wildlife connectivity, which may require some additional revegetation, redesign or even relocation. This will require extra attention to habitat protection and enhancement on national forest lands in the vicinity, and prioritizing land acquisitions. A key element of the plan's monitoring program would be to carefully assess the corridors and the impacts of those recreational developments.

We appreciate the efforts of the US Forest Service to date in the I-90 wildlife corridor, and encourage you to take the opportunity presented by the Forest Plan revision process to complement the ongoing investments in this area. We look forward to meeting with you to discuss these ideas in greater detail, and participating in the plan revision process.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Colby Chester
Steering Committee Member
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CC: Brian White, WSDOT I-90 Project Director