



File Code: 1950

Date: April 25, 2008,

Dear National Forest User,

The purpose of this letter is to inform you of progress on the proposed ***White Chuck Road Repair (Road # 23)***, and to invite your continued scoping comments.

In 2004, we mailed a scoping letter describing initiation of the environmental analysis of repairs to 2003 flood damaged roads across the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest (the Forest). The Darrington Ranger District proposed to restore vehicular access to the White Chuck drainage by making repairs to three small segments along Road 23: a repair at milepost (MP) 1.9, a re route-around the damaged road section at MP 2.4, and a repair at MP 3.5. An Environmental Assessment (EA) was prepared for this project and was scheduled to be released in 2007 for 30-day public comment. However, in the spring of 2007, Forest Service staff discovered additional impacts from the November 2006 flood to this road system. Since that time, the Forest along with the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) staff have inventoried these new impacts and documented them in Damage Survey Reports, which identify what flood damage qualifies for Emergency Relief for Federally Owned Roads (ERFO) funding. There are five additional sites on Road 23 that were impacted by the 2006/2007 high waters; these sites are located at MP 3.4, MP 5.9, MP 6.4, MP 7.2, and MP 8.5. Only MP 3.4 and MP 5.9 sites were approved by FHWA in 2008 for emergency repair funding following the 2006 /2007 events.

Forest aquatic specialists and engineers reviewed the 2006/2007 damage of Road 23 in relation to soil and slope stability and determined that the upper road section from MP 5.9 to MP 8.5 of Road 23 is at high risk for continued damage from slope movement. The White Chuck River is expected to continue to erode the toe of the slope with the potential for additional slide activity. Forest staff discussed the options and potential costs to maintain Road 23, and developed a proposal to repair the White Chuck Road 23 from the beginning of the road to the junction of Road 23 with Road 27 (Rat Trap Pass road). Given current road maintenance funding and the risk assessment, the Forest proposes to decommission Road 23 beyond the junction with Road 27 to a walkable tread.

The proposed road repair area is located in Sections 13, 14, 16, 17, and 18 of Township 31 North, Range 11 East; and in Section 19 of Township 31 North, Range 12 East (see enclosed map).

## **DESCRIPTION OF THE PROPOSED PROJECT**

**Purpose of the Project:** The purpose of the proposed road repair is to restore vehicular access to a portion of the White Chuck drainage and to connect Road 23 with Road 27 in order to provide multi-seasonal recreational and administrative uses, and to close a portion of road located on unstable slopes. This action would implement objectives of the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie Land and Resource Management Plan, as amended by the April 14, 1994 Record of Decision for Amendments to the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management Planning Documents Within the Range of the Northern Spotted Owl. Under the Forest Plan as amended, portions of



the proposed Road 23 repairs are within designations of Matrix and Riparian Reserve. The Forest Plan, as amended, includes Standards and Guidelines for these land designations. Matrix lands are those not included in other categories of designated areas; most scheduled timber harvest activities are conducted within Matrix lands.

Road 23 would connect with Forest Road #27 that provides access to a trailhead with destinations of Crystal Lake, Circle Peak, and Meadow Mountain. The proposed road repair would provide recreational access to Forest trails and camping areas, and provide administrative access for timber management and law enforcement within the lower White Chuck River drainage.

Road 23 beyond the junction with Road 27 would be decommissioned due to concerns with unstable slopes and high risk of further movement due to toe slope erosion of the bench on which Road 23 was constructed. The combination of active landslide terrain and high risk of toe slope erosion has a potential for expensive future road maintenance and future repairs that would be difficult to cover with current road maintenance budgets.

The five miles of decommissioned Road 23 would include removal of culverts and the toilets at the Owl Creek dispersed campsite and White Chuck trailhead. The concrete bridge at Owl Creek would not be removed, and the decommissioned road prism would be left in a walkable tread. The 2006/2007 flood events that damaged additional sites on Road 23 also inflicted additional damage to the White Chuck trail (#643.01). At this time, options for the damaged White Chuck trail are still being considered.

### **Purpose and Need:**

The Purpose and Need for the proposed action has two components along with units of measure for each.

1. Restore motorized vehicle access for recreational use, administrative management, and law enforcement within a portion of the White Chuck River drainage.
  - Number of trailheads (stock unloading) and trails accessed by vehicle;
  - Number of facilities (toilets) accessed by vehicle;
  - Number of camping areas accessed by vehicle;
  - Acres of matrix land (and percentage of matrix on Forest) accessed by Road 23, Road 27, and spur roads; and
  - Number of daytrip trail routes (12 miles or less round trip) accessed by road and number of miles of daytrips (12 miles or less round trip).
2. Reduce miles of road on unstable slopes that require costly maintenance and degrade aquatic habitat.
  - Miles and acres of road decommissioned on unstable slopes;
  - Miles of road on active landslide topography;

**Decisions to Be Made:** The decisions to be made by the USFS deciding official with the White Chuck Road Repair project are the following:

- Whether to restore vehicle access on the White Chuck Road to the junction with Road 27, with repairs to four sites;
- Whether to decommission the remaining 5 miles of Road 23 to a walkable tread (not a trail);
- and if so, under what mitigation measures and monitoring the repairs and decommissioning will be conducted.

**Alternatives:** In addition to the Proposed Action, previous alternatives considered include the no action alternative, along with an action alternative, and seven additional options that were considered but not further studied in detail. Additional alternatives will be developed as the interdisciplinary team reviews issues.

**Proposed Action:** The Proposed Action consists of restoring vehicle access in the White Chuck River drainage to the junction with Road 27, with repairs at four sites of Road 23 (MP 1.9, MP 2.4, MP 3.4 and MP 3.5); (The previous proposed action proposed restoration of vehicle access to the terminus of Road 23 with the repair of three sites on Road 23). In addition, Road 23, from the junction with Road 27 to the White Chuck trailhead, would be decommissioned (MP 5.8 to terminus). Culverts would be excavated and removed, and unstable fillslope pulled. The concrete bridge at Owl Creek would not be removed, and the decommissioned road prism would be left in a walkable tread. The 2006/2007 flood events that damaged additional sites on Road 23 also inflicted additional damage to the White Chuck trail (#643.01). At this time, options for the damaged White Chuck trail are still being considered. A segment of road east of the junction of Roads 23 and Road 27 would be retained as a turnaround and a potential dispersed camping location.

- At MP 1.9, the road would be repaired in place, by lowering the approach grades of the road to lessen fill material. The dip in the road would be constructed on large irregular shaped rock to an elevation above the 100-year flood level. Logs would be incorporated into the rock to provide a rough surface along the river channel. (This proposal received public scoping comments in 2004.)
- At MP 2.4, the road would be re-routed above the washout, utilizing 2,300 feet (0.44 mile) of Road 2311. At about MP 0.4 of Road 2311, new road construction would leave the existing Road 2311 and connect back to Road 23 past the second site of road damage. Approximately 1,200 feet (0.23 mile) of new road would be constructed with a large through-cut and fill to an unnamed creek. A culvert large enough to pass 100-year flood waters would be installed in the fill across the unnamed creek. (This proposal received public scoping comments in 2004). Approximately 0.3 mile of Road 23 from the washout east to where the new connector road ties in, and west to the junction with Road 2311, would be decommissioned.
- At Milepost 3.4, the road would be re-routed around the washout before Stujack Creek. The reroute would construct approximately 600 feet (0.11 mile) of road across a 25 percent sideslope above the washout, 400 feet from the White Chuck River. The new road alignment would leave Road 23 about 300 feet before the project site and re-enter

Road 23 at 300 feet beyond the center of the damaged site. Road drainage would be directed away from the slide area.

- At MP 3.5, the gravel and bedload material that is plugging the culvert in Stujack Creek would be removed. This material would be used as fill material to rebuild the approximate 50 feet of road washed away in the 2003 flood due to the plugged culvert. The stream channel would be reconstructed for 100 feet above the box culvert inlet to remove bedload material and debris to allow for a free flowing and unobstructed stream channel into the culvert. (This proposal received public scoping comments in 2004.)
- At MP 5.9, approximately 550 feet of road has slumped at various depths. Decommissioning at this site would include removal of culverts and unstable fill slope materials, and restore natural hillslope drainage patterns.
- At MP 6.45, the road has slumped for 275 feet. Decommissioning at this site would include removal of culverts and unstable fill slope materials, and restore natural hillslope drainage patterns.
- At MP 7.2, the road fill has failed for 60 feet along the outer shoulder. Decommissioning at this site would include removal of culverts and unstable fill slope materials, and restore natural hillslope drainage patterns.
- At MP 8.5, the road fill slope has failed causing a narrow roadway for approximately 350 feet. Decommissioning at this site would include removal of culverts and unstable fill slope materials, and restore natural hillslope drainage patterns.
- At the White Chuck Trailhead, structures to be removed include two toilets, the trailhead bulletin board, fee use sign, and trail registration box for the White Chuck Trailhead.

**Preliminary Issues:** An interdisciplinary team will review the previous scoping results and conduct an environmental analysis of the updated proposed action. It now consists of repair to four sites along Road 23 below the junction with Road 27, and decommissioning of approximately the last five miles of Road 23. Environmental analysis will continue for the next several months. The interdisciplinary team and interested public have identified the following preliminary issues raised by the updated proposed action. Additional issues may result from continued scoping and interdisciplinary analysis. The interdisciplinary team will use significant issues to modify the alternatives, form a new alternative, develop management requirements and mitigation measures, or track environmental effects.

- The lower Road 23 repairs at MP 1.9 may have adverse effects to river and floodplain processes, with further effects on aquatic integrity, Riparian Reserve conditions, water quality, and fish habitat.
- Lower Road 23 repairs may be subject to future flood impacts, and therefore not cost effective.
- Lower Road 23 repairs may be high-risk because they are within a river drainage with unstable slopes and flash flows.
- Upper Road 23 decommissioning would adversely affect recreational access into the White Chuck River drainage.

- Upper Road 23 decommissioning would preclude vehicle access to some matrix lands as available for timber management.

## **REQUEST FOR COMMENTS**

We are asking for new comments, or updates to any previous comments you may have submitted, on issues raised by the proposed action to restore vehicle access in a portion of the White Chuck River drainage with the repair of Road 23 in four places as described above, and to decommission the upper portion of the road, with the abandonment of the White Chuck Trail (#643.01). Your previous comments are on record with us and do not need to be provided again. Because this proposal departs from the 2006 repair proposal to open Road 23 to the trailhead, you may wish to review your previous comments and update them.

The Environmental Assessment is projected to be available for public comment early in 2009. A decision is expected in the spring. The District Ranger is the Deciding Official for this project.

In order to ensure your comments and concerns are considered in the analysis process, please comment by May 30, 2008. Written comments should be sent or dropped off to Phyllis Reed, Interdisciplinary Team Leader, at 1405 Emens Street, Darrington, WA 98241. Comments may also be faxed to (360) 436-1309, or e-mailed to [plreed@fs.fed.us](mailto:plreed@fs.fed.us). If you have any questions regarding this proposed project, please contact Phyllis between 7:30 am and 4:30 pm, Monday through Friday at (360) 436-1155 ext. 216.

Your concerns and comments on our proposed actions are important to us. I welcome a meeting if you should so desire. Please feel free to contact me any time at the number above.

Sincerely,

PETER R. FORBES  
District Ranger

Enclosure