

## Recreation Facilities Analysis

### Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest Proposed 5-Year Program of Work

April 21, 2008

#### Background

The Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest is proposing future management of developed recreation sites through a process called "Recreation Facilities Analysis" (RFA). Every national forest in the country has or will soon be completing this process.

On the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie NF this study looked at the operations and maintenance of 200 developed recreation sites including campgrounds, picnic areas, lookouts, visitor centers, trailheads and other facilities. As in so many places, operating budgets have been flat or are declining while operating costs have been increasing. Recreation use continues to increase and diversify, yet our facilities are aging. Many of these sites were built 30-50 years ago and are nearing the end of their useful lives without a significant investment in deferred maintenance or improvements. The fundamental premise of this planning process is to create an inventory of developed sites which is sustainable and flexible enough to be annually adapted to changes in demand, available resources and opportunities.

The Recreation Facility Analysis process involves several steps: gathering inventory and financial data; identifying the forest recreation niche; evaluating each developed recreation site against established national criteria (including conformance with the forest niche, financial efficiency, and environmental and community sustainability); and ranking the recreation sites according to those criteria. Using this analysis tool, the Forest has drafted a proposed program of work for the next five years that we believe allows us to meet current and future recreation demands while remaining financially efficient.

#### How this process is made specific to the MBSNF: Recreation Niche

A forest's recreation niche defines the best-suited recreation opportunities and experiences that the forest can provide. It speaks to what makes a forest special, and fosters quality recreation versus quantity, or trying to provide all things to all the people. It provides a good description of the uniquely special recreation opportunities provided by the Forest within the context of the forest's ecological features, opportunities provided by others in the area, and the demands and desires of the visitors now and into the future.

The Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest recreation niche is:

#### *Experience the Cascades*

*"The snowcapped peaks of the Cascade Mountains tower above the green clad old-growth forests creating a world class recreation setting for the millions living in the nearby Puget Sound Metro area. Many seek refuge from the city in the unique forests, rivers, and high-alpine environment of the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. Here, contemporary urban life, environmental awareness and lifestyle merge as nowhere else to connect people to the land and easy-to-access day use recreation encourages an active, healthy lifestyle. The Forest and its communities strive to be national leaders in informing and connecting a rapidly growing diverse population that recreates throughout the northwest."*

This niche statement and the supporting documentation provide an umbrella context for all recreation programs on the forest and help’s us to match up what is most wanted with what we can best provide, to create the most value for the public within or available budgets.

**More about the Recreation Facility Analysis:**

The Forest completed an evaluation of each developed recreation site using established national criteria, ranking their recreation sites according to those criteria, and making a recommendation for a Proposed 5-Year program of work. The criteria included:

- Conformance to the forest niche and amount of recreation use (35%).
- Financial efficiency (35%).
- Environmental and community sustainability (30%).

We also considered if sites were under some type of operational or contractual agreement whose terms were longer than the 5-year period of the analysis (i.e. concession campgrounds or FERC agreements).

The Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest evaluated a total of 200 developed recreation sites. The following table reflects the number of sites evaluated by “site type”.

	Trailheads	Campgrounds	Lookout/Cabin	Group Camps	Picnic	Interpretative Minor	Boating	Camping Area	Observation	Snowpark	Information	Horse Camp	Other Winter Sports
Site Type	109	29	11	11	9	7	4	4	4	4	3	3	1

**The Proposed Actions and Program of Work for the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest:**

The Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest currently manages 232 developed recreation sites. There are 32 sites that are either closed (washed out roads) or were not studied (Ski Areas, Recreation Residences, etc.) The Recreation Facilities Analysis studied the 200 sites shown above. The following is a summary of the proposed changes that will bring the Forest’s infrastructure into alignment with the budget available to maintain and operates these sites.

- Remove constructed features at 8 sites and manage them as dispersed recreation sites (*Monte Cristo CG, Whitechuck TH, North Fork Skykomish TH, Wagon Road TH, Glacier Viewpoint, North Mountain Lookout, Texas Pond Camp Area, Monte Cristo Documentary Site*)
- Close 1 site (*Greenwater/Rainier Viewpoint Trailhead*).
- Change the season of management at 10 sites to reflect current operational seasons and better serve the public.
- Remove or eliminate a cost source at 8 sites.
- Reduce service frequency at 1 site.

- Increase and/or upgrade facilities at 56 existing sites to better meet customer expectations and protect resources.
- Change the operator or work force to operate and maintain 19 sites through partnerships or concessionaire operation.
- Change fees at 28 sites to meet public demand and increase recreation opportunities.
- Change the capacity (PAOT's) at 5 sites.
- Convert 11 sites to a lower standard of site.
- Replace or major repair of 40 sites.
- No change in the management of 88 sites.

The specific list of Proposed Management Actions by Ranger District and Site Name is available for review. Please contact your local ranger district or the Forest Supervisor's office with questions and comments about our process or proposed management actions. We would like to hear from you.

**Results:**

The following results can be expected upon implementation of the proposed management actions across the Forest. These particular results focus specifically on financial sustainability, reduced deferred maintenance, and meeting quality health and safety standards at all developed recreation sites.

<b>Result</b>	<b>Baseline Condition</b>	<b>Program of Work after year 5</b>	<b>Percent Change</b>
Appropriated Funds Available 1	\$157,170	\$157,170	0%
Fee receipts Available	\$292,760	\$322,987	+6%
Other Revenue Available	\$457,283	\$137,906	-70%
Annual Operating Costs	\$473,597	\$370,478	-22%
Annual Maintenance Costs	\$230,492	\$179,986	-22%
Deferred Maintenance Costs	\$3,554,547	\$1,284,257	-64%

1 Appropriated funds available