



April 26, 2021

Senator Maria Cantwell  
511 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Cantwell:

Citizens for Forest Roads (CFFR) is a non-profit volunteer organization that has been working for ten years to keep public roads open for access to the public lands of the Mt Baker Snoqualmie National Forest (MBS NF). Over the last five years, we have focused our efforts on the Highway 542 corridor of the MBS NF in the North Fork Nooksack River Drainage.

We are writing to express CFFR's **urgent concerns about the lack of an adequate road maintenance budget and staffing for maintaining public access roads within the 1.7 million-acre MBS NF.** As you know, the MBS NF runs along the west slope of the Cascades Mountains, from the Canadian Border to Mt. Rainier. It is considered an urban forest due to its proximity to cities like Tacoma, Seattle, Everett and Bellingham Washington, as well as the lower mainland BC, and Vancouver, BC. During the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, recreation in the MBS NF increased by an estimated 100 to 300% (a normal year average increase is 15%). Even with the U.S./Canadian Border shut down, the Glacier/Mt Baker Recreational Area usage was estimated by the NF to have increased 140%.

Our immediate concern is **the backlog of deferred road maintenance on the MBS NF infrastructure that is 60+ years old.** In 2006 the four MBS NF ranger districts received approximately \$2.6 million for road maintenance. In FY2021 there is virtually no MBS NF budget for road maintenance. This highly-used road system has received repeated analyses at the forest, district, watershed, and timber sale basin levels which have all determined that these roads are required for recreation access and fire management, which both continue to increase. Annual road maintenance typically consists of removing trees that have blown down across roads, brushing the sides of the roads, clearing boulders and rubble off of the road running surface, cleaning out ditches and culverts so they drain, grading the road surface to shed water, and grading out pot (chuck) holes.

Of particular note, the Glacier Creek Road #39 located in the Mt. Baker District desperately needs stabilization, culvert replacement and asphalt. This road has a long history of recreation use dating back to the early 1960's. It provides access to the Heliotrope Ridge Trailhead #677 that is the major starting point for climbing Mt. Baker, along with providing access to multiple popular overlooks. This route provides critical access for recreational climbers; in addition, to seventeen local commercial guide services for climbing Mt. Baker.

**The bottom line is that the MBS NF road maintenance budget is at an all-time low, while visitor use and demand on the road system is at an all-time high and increasing.** Maintenance of these roads is of critical importance for

fire safety, public access to trailheads, viewpoints, general recreation use, and helping to reduce the risk of damage to downstream natural resources, as well as to human life.

Not only is the road maintenance funding in short supply but there is also a **critical shortage in “Forest Service Certified” qualified engineer staffing able to produce contracts, and administer contracts for needed road repairs in the MBS NF.** Recent impacts from the lack of adequate skilled staffing in the MBS NF have led to road contracts not being awarded. These delays have resulted in roads (such as Canyon Creek Road #31) that are now at risk of being closed to major hiking and snowmobiling areas along with potential catastrophic failures and degradation to natural resources downstream.

Lack of adequate funding for road maintenance in the MBS NF significantly increases the risk of road failures and landslides that can damage downstream natural resources. In addition to the risk of damage to downstream public and private resources (recreation areas, bridges, towns, utilities and other sites), Federal Endangered Species Act (ESA) listed fish stocks, including Puget Sound Chinook Salmon, Puget Sound Steelhead, and Coastal/Puget Sound Bull Trout stocks in the Nooksack, Skagit, Stillaguamish, Snohomish, and Puyallup rivers, are at risk. These watersheds have large areas containing naturally unstable areas, due to a combination of geology, steep slopes, unstable soils, climate driven rain-on-snow events, and other factors. It is important to understand how these factors relate to and affect the various road treatments and road maintenance standards.

We strongly urge Congress to **provide adequate maintenance funding for staffing, contracting and other resources necessary to maintain these hundreds of miles of public roads on National Forest lands.** “The Great American Outdoor Act” provides revenues from federal energy development on public lands that are deposited into the “Public Land Legacy Restoration Fund” and the “Land and Water Conservation Fund,” to handle overdue maintenance for public land management agencies, including the USFS. Agriculture Secretary Vilsack recently made clear the need to increase the USFS budget and the critical importance of maintaining the road system to provide recreation, forest management, and fire access. These funds should be utilized to help provide adequate road maintenance in MBS NF.

In summary, **CFFR recommends that the MBS NF receive an annual budget of at least \$3.0 million for road maintenance and; in addition, \$2.5 million for the reconstruction of Glacier Creek Road #39 that provides critical access to Mt. Baker.** We would be glad to provide more information, or answer questions regarding this very urgent situation, taking place in the MBS NF.

Sincerely, Roger Nichols

**Roger**

Roger Nichols, President  
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