

# Washington State Senator Linda Evans Parlette writes to United States Senator Maria Cantwell...

As you know, in late 2003 a flood of record struck the Stehekin River. This resulted in extensive damage to private property within the community of Stehekin, severe damage to roads and other National Park Service infrastructure within Lake Chelan National Recreation Area, and unprecedented damage to the Upper Stehekin Valley Road within the North Cascades National Park.

The community, with assistance from Chelan County, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the National Park Service has repaired virtually all damage to infrastructure within Lake Chelan National Recreation Area and the Lower Stehekin Valley road from future flood damage. The Upper Stehekin Valley Road, however remains impassable above Car Wash Falls.

The Upper Stehekin Valley Road runs approximately 12.8 Miles from the National Park - National Recreation area boundary at High Bridge to Cottonwood Camp. Car Wash Falls is located just 1.7 miles above High Bridge. The Washington Parks Wilderness Act of 1988 (PL 100-668), which establishes the Stephen Mather Wilderness Area, provides for a 100' wide non-wilderness corridor to accommodate this road segment. This was done in recognition of the traditional and vital role that this road plays in providing access to exceptional day hikes and fishing opportunities in the upper Stehekin Valley. The General Management Plan for Lake Chelan National Recreation Area, produced by the National Park Service in 1995, reconfirmed the importance of maintaining road access to Cottonwood Camp.

In April 2006 the National Park Service released a draft Environmental Assessment for the Upper Stehekin Valley Road. That document analyzed four alternatives: A) No action; B) Abandon the road above Car Wash Falls, develop a trailhead just below Car Wash Falls, and provide for trail access only from that point; C) Rebuild the road within the existing non-wilderness corridor (an alternative that has subsequently been shown to be virtually impossible due to the continuing instability of a landslide caused by the flood); and D) If Congress amends the Washington Parks Wilderness Act of 1988, relocate the destroyed portion of the present road to the "Old Wagon Road" (which was the original Upper Stehekin Valley Road), reroute the road around the section of road that washed out in 1995 and, using the existing undamaged road for the remainder, reestablish vehicular access to Cottonwood Camp.

Over 260 people provided written comment to the National Park Service regarding this draft. Nearly 90% strongly endorsed vehicular access to Cottonwood Camp. Many of those comments pointed out how damaging the loss of the Upper Stehekin Valley Road would be to the economy and lifestyles of Valley residents and generations of property owners. Others addressed the many popular day hikes that would no longer be possible and how this would concentrate use in what would become an over-crowded lower Stehekin Valley. Loss of access by the very young, the mobility impaired, and the very old were mentioned by several commenters. Nevertheless, the National Park Services issued its Finding of No Significant Impact announcing its plan to formally abandon the road above Car Wash Falls and to limit future access to hikers and stock parties only.

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I find this decision to be particularly ironic in light of the recent released Draft General Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement for Olympic National Park. With respect to conditions very similar to the Upper Stehekin Valley Road (specifically the Hoh, Queets, and Quinault Roads) the National Park Service preferred alternative recommends that, "if road relocation away from river meander areas is feasible, wilderness boundary modification would be sought as necessary, with not net loss of total Olympic National Park wilderness acreage."

It is my hope, Senator Cantwell, that you will sponsor legislation to amend the Washington Parks Wilderness Act of 1988. The amendment should require the National Park Service to maintain the Upper Stehekin Valley Road within the Stephen Mather Wilderness Area from High Bridge to Cottonwood Camp within a 100' wide non-wilderness corridor and, when necessary, to relocate the road and its non-wilderness corridor so long as there is no net loss of total wilderness acreage. The amendment should also authorize the appropriation of up to \$1.5 million to relocate this road segment and perform post-flood plain repairs. In its "Upper Stehekin Valley Road Car Wash Falls (MP 12.9) to Cottonwood Camp (MP22.8) Environmental Assessment" dated March 29, 2006 the National Park Service estimates the cost of this work at \$1,339,075.

This is a matter of great concern to many of the constituents in the district as well as throughout the state. Please let me know if you can be of assistance in resolving this issue appropriately.

Sincerely,  
Linda Evans Parlette  
Washington State Senator  
12th Legislative District

Cc U.S. Senator Patty Murray  
Congressman Doc Hastings  
Bill Paleck, Superintendent, North Cascades National Park Complex  
Chelan County Commissioners

