

“THIS ROAD PROVIDES CRITICAL ACCESS FOR FIRE SUPPRESSION AND IS, THEREFORE, CRITICAL TO THE HEALTH AND SAFETY OF RESIDENTS OF OUR SMALL COMMUNITY. THAT STATEMENT MAY, IN FACT, PROVE TO BE A GROSS UNDERSTATEMENT.”

~STEHKIN FIRE DISTRICT #10 COMMISSIONERS~

ACCESS CRITICAL TO PUBLIC SAFETY

As commissioners of the newly formed Chelan County Fire District #10, we are writing to request that you support legislation that would reestablish the Stehekin Valley road to Cottonwood with no net loss of wilderness. This road provides critical access for fire suppression and is, therefore, critical to the health and safety of residents of our small community. That statement may, in fact, prove to be a gross understatement.

As you may know, the Stehekin Valley Road is not one road among many in the valley. It is the only road that accesses vast forests northwest of our small community. This is the direction of the prevailing winds; it is the direction from which we face the greatest threat of catastrophic wildfire. Much of the forest is unhealthy including large stands of beetle-infested or diseased trees that speed the spread of fire. Should a fire get started in these stands at the height of summer, winds would likely cause rapid spread into the lower valley putting lives at risk.

The best hope for avoiding such a disaster is rapid response. Throughout Stehekin’s hundred-year history, the Stehekin Valley road has provided access for firefighters. As recently as 2003, firefighters used this road to contain the 80-acre Shady fire. If the road had been closed, as it is now, firefighters would have lost critical hours by either hiking into the burning area – a slow and dangerous approach – or waiting for limited air-supported resources (helicopter rappellers, smokejumpers) to access the blaze. Areas clear enough for a helicopter to land are also limited in the dense forests, creating additional access difficulties.

Our first concern as commissioners is the health and safety of local residents, but there are also financial considerations. The cost of fighting just one catastrophic wildfire can easily exceed the cost of road reconstruction. In the past six years alone, we have seen the 2001 Rex Creek Fire (\$4.3 million), the 2004 Deep Harbor Complex (\$18.6 million), and the 2006 Flick Creek Fire (\$4.1 million) along Lake Chelan. Once again, the key to avoiding such costs is rapid response which depends upon access.

We are asking that you take whatever steps necessary to assure that this road is reestablished. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,
Ana Maria Spagna
David Kurth
Bob Nielsen
Stehekin Fire District #10 Commissioners

“BY EVENING THE FIRE WHICH WE HAD ENCOUNTERED IN THE MORNING HAD SWEEPED DOWN TO NEAR THE CABIN, AND ONLY WITH THE GREATEST EXERTIONS, AND BY OURSELVES BURNING A SPACE AROUND IT, WAS IT SAVED. WE WERE ALL COMPELLED TO SPREAD OUR BLANKETS THAT NIGHT ON A SAND ISLAND AT THE MOUTH OF THE RIVER IN ORDER TO BE SECURE FROM THE BURNING TREES. ...THE FIRE RAN UP BOTH SIDES OF THE CANYON TO THE VERY SUMMITS OF THE MOUNTAINS WITH THE SPEED OF A HURRICANE, ACCOMPANIED BY TERRIFIC CRACKLING AND ROARING. IT WAS A GRAND, BUT FEARFUL SPECTACLE, AS WE LAY ON THE SAND BAR ON THE NIGHT OF AUGUST 2ND, WATCHING THE IMMENSE SHEETS OF LURID FLAME LICKING UP EVERYTHING IN THEIR PATH AS THEY FOLLOWED ALONG THE SHORE OF THE LAKE, FROM THE WATER’S EDGE TO THE VERY SUMMIT, MAKING A VERITABLE MOUNTAIN OF FIRE. AT FREQUENT INTERVALS HUGE ROCKS LOOSENEED BY THE GREAT HEAT WENT TUMBLING DOWN THE PRECIPITOUS MOUNTAIN SIDES WITH A CRASHING NOISE AND PLUNGED INTO THE LAKE BELOW, THROWING UP GREAT COLUMNS OF WATER, RED TINTED IN THE GLARE OF THE BURNING FOREST.”

1889 ~ ALFRED DOWNING ~ A VISITOR TO JOHN HORTON’S CABIN



FLICK CREEK FIRE 2006



FIRE 2007



DOMKE FIRE 2007



FIRE FIGHTERS AT STEHEKIN LANDING
2007