

LETTER FROM TERRY LAVENDER

IN RESPONSE TO

AN EDITORIAL IN THE WILD CASCADES SENT TO:

EDITOR, THE WILD CASCADES, SUMMER/FALL 2007

NORTH CASCADES CONSERVATION COUNCIL

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As a long time member of the “environmental community” I am appalled to see the use of inflammatory language and untruths in “Hastings Launches Effort to Gut the Wilderness System”. It is discouraging to see tactics, long complained about by environmentalists, used in THE WILD CASCADES magazine.

In Denali National Park, there is administrative authority to move access roads for trails and services when damaged in storm or flood events without an Act of Congress. The non wilderness corridors are fixed in size but flexible in location as the environment changes. This provision has existed since the Park Wilderness overlay was established. Because the Washington Wilderness Act creating the Stephen Mather Wilderness Area designated a 100 foot wide road corridor tied to geographic points with no such flexibility, it truly takes an Act of Congress to move an access road that has been damaged by flooding.

The Hastings proposal simply asks that the 100 foot non Wilderness Road corridor be traded to an area well away from the river and the riparian area next to the river become wilderness. This is the same administrative flexibility that exists in Denali. The Hastings proposal is carefully specific only to the Stehekin Road. There is no change in the amount of wilderness, no change in the Park management plan allowing road access to trailheads, no change in the requirements of the Environmental Species Act, no huge amount of acreage involved (less than three miles of one lane dirt road is about seven acres) and no conspiracy to remove the overall wilderness designation. How can this be gutting the Wilderness System? Are we really so afraid of common sense and flexibility, so stuck in the fear of giving an inch that this kind of language is necessary and acceptable. If so, I think we are at great risk of being marginalized as extremists.

The article contains several less than factual points. It states that the Park Service decided to close the damaged road after extensive public process – True. The majority of testimony, both written and oral was in favor of keeping the road open, however. The majority of editorial press across the State has also favored keeping the road open. The proposal to trade the riparian area to wilderness and move the road is precisely so the road will be easier and less expensive to maintain. Yes, it is less expensive to maintain nothing but disingenuous not to compare maintaining the road in the existing location vs. a less flood prone location. A less vulnerable location would leave intact the Park management plan that includes this limited access corridor to accommodate visitors.

I am saddened that common sense or at least fact based disagreement is not part of what the environmental community holds sacred. It will be very difficult to put together coalitions for additional Wilderness Areas like the Wild Sky, Wild Pratt River or Alpine Lakes addition if members who are not strong, long distance backpackers or willing to cede areas from all human use feel their access is threatened. As environmental advocates, I think we do harm by attempting to exclude reasonable human use and enjoyment by a broad range of citizens from my 77 year old mother to casual day hikers like myself who just might fall in love with the North Cascades and become strong advocates for protection.

It was the NCCC and others who successfully secured this area as National Park by showing the wonders and beauty of the Horseshoe Basin which was a day hike from the end of the Stehekin Road at the Park’s inception. It is now completely out of reach by all but a strong few. I think we will pay dearly for the loss of this inspirational opportunity.

How can you help reopen the road?... See back page

