

The Role of American Alps in Maintaining and Enhancing Outdoor Recreation

The challenging task of the American Alps Legacy Proposal is to address long-term conservation issues, to assure that pristine backcountry areas are not damaged by any recommended changes, to enhance non-motorized front-country recreation access for families, and to be open-minded about the existing recreation uses in the area.

The American Alps proposal will support maintaining many of the existing recreation uses on the proposed new park lands. This can be accomplished through explicit legislative language. We would like to see backcountry party-size limits for non-profit groups providing outdoor experiences for youth maintained at their current level. Mountain biking on the most popular mountain biking trails in the area could be continued. Dog walking could be allowed in areas where it will not significantly impact wildlife or the outdoor experiences of other visitors.

Other recreation uses will not be impacted much by the American Alps proposal. Horseback riding is allowed in national parks and will continue as a recreation activity. Snowmobile use will still be possible on State Route 20 (state highway right-of-way that is regulated by the Washington State Department of Transportation). The American Alps proposal will accept environmentally compatible snowmobile access to the Hart's Pass road. The areas around State Route 20 and Hart's Pass will remain available to backcountry skiers who use snowmobiles for access. Backpacking and hiking will continue unchanged under park management, with the minor annoyance (major to a few) of obtaining permits for backcountry camping.

Other recreation activities will be impacted by the American Alps proposal. We have tried to reduce those impacts. Several hunting areas have been excluded from the American Alps proposal. These include the Sauk Mountain to Baker Lake area, lands south of the Cascade River, and the portion of the National Recreation Area east of Ross Lake. Other areas, especially along the State Route 20 corridor where family recreation is more prevalent, would be converted to front-country park and would no longer be available for hunting. The American Alps proposal will support continuation of the existing heli-skiing permit for the full term of the permit (nearly a decade). At that point, the National Park Service would need to evaluate whether this recreation use should continue.

Family-friendly recreation opportunities should be increased substantially along the State Route 20 corridor. That means adding new amenities specifically for children and young adults with children. The American Alps proposal will include 25 miles of new front-country trails, multiple ecotourism and cultural interpretation sites, and a waterfall tour. The proposal will also include new and more accessible park visitor centers in Marblemount and Winthrop.

Conservation is compatible with the separate, but very important effort to bring youth back to nature (see: "Last Child in the Woods" by Richard Louv). When we propose front-country family-friendly amenities, we are not talking about RV parking lots, paved trails, or waterfall loops. We are proposing a short trail to a scenic overlook of the Skagit Valley, a salmon viewing platform on Bacon Creek, a guided tour of the native plant restoration facility in Marblemount, or a nature trail from Lone Fir Campground up Pine Creek to the falls.

Other than the party-size limit discussed above, the American Alps proposal will not promote any changes in backcountry management of the national park. This vast area will be left in its current wild and pristine condition. Family-friendly front-country recreation along State Route 20 can be developed in a way that is compatible with wildlife conservation in the North Cascades

National Park. The American Alps proposal will include language requiring the National Park Service to identify, preserve, and enhance wildlife corridors that cross State Route 20.

Recreation is the cornerstone of economic activity in gateway communities around the North Cascades National Park. An economic study on the American Alps proposal has shown that the proposed increase in the size of the North Cascades National Park and the addition of family-friendly recreation amenities will significantly increase visitation to front-country areas of the park. The economic study found that if the American Alps proposal is enacted, more than 1,000 new jobs will be created over the next two decades in gateway communities from Twisp to Concrete.

The American Alps proposal would place new visitor centers in gateway communities, not within park boundaries or just outside park gateways. This will help focus the economic benefits of park designation within gateway communities and not within or adjacent to the park itself. The American Alps proposal will not include any commercial development on or adjacent to North Cascades National Park lands.

The American Alps Legacy Proposal has been shaped by our focus on the long-run approach to conservation. We are concerned about who is going to be here in 20, 30, or 50 years to protect the North Cascades from logging, mining, biomass extraction, energy development, and other threats. We recognize that access should be maintained for future mountain bikers, dog walkers, horseback riders, and skiers (people who will advocate for continued protection of the North Cascades). We want to increase recreation opportunities for today's youth, whose support will be essential for long-run conservation of the North Cascades. We believe that businesses in gateway communities that are dependent on recreation should prosper from tourist spending, so that local leaders will be there in the future to advocate for protecting the North Cascades.