

RECREATION PLAN

Baker to Bellingham



Transcribed Written Comments* Submitted at Recreation Planning Committee Meeting

January 9, 2018 | 6 to 9 p.m.

Deming Library, 5044 Mt. Baker Highway, Bellingham

* Included typed and handwritten comments

DRAFT – Subject to Change Without Notification

BAKER TO BELLINGHAM RECREATION PLAN

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ORV use is controversial. It currently is a prohibited use on Commercial Forest lands in Whatcom County. Why are you jeopardizing an otherwise stellar recreation plan by engaging in the long process of acquiring a zoning amendment and picking a battle with public opinion in order to appease a vocal minority of ORV advocates?

Out of 32 outdoor activities surveyed by the planning committee, just 4 were directly related to ORV use . Yet of the 17 stakeholder representatives on the planning committee, SIX of them directly represent the ORV community, (2 from the same club!)

Your own survey results reflect how heavily skewed this representation is, by showing that the most popular form of ORV use, motorcycle riding, is ranked 9th in use popularity, well behind wildlife viewing, nature observation, mushroom picking, mountain biking, m6 ot ii51 g-and other pursuits which would be degraded in quality of experience by the presence of ORV's. The survey results also show that the 4 most important factors in quality of experience for the 1300 respondents were: cleanliness, environmental stewardship, adherence to trail-use rules and personal safety. Again, these all are qualities that would be degraded with the presence of ORVs.

The residents surrounding Red and Sumas Mountains have been dealing with the negative impacts of illegal ORV use on DNR lands for decades. We have watched trails and jeep roads built, streams scoured and rooted up, endured noise and inappropriate shooting, loud partying and garbage strewn about. We repeatedly have asked the DNR for enforcement, and have NEVER received a positive response. There is no reason to trust that the DNR will magically begin to enforce the rules just because there are some official trails built among all the illegal trails. Because of this history of abuse and lack of responsiveness to residents' concerns, this community will fight to keep ORV use off of state forest lands in Whatcom County. We fought the ORV lobby and won back in 1987, and since the DNR has failed to show in any way since then that they can, as an agency, control where and how ORVs get used, we will fight it again. In conclusion, I want to express my support for developed recreation on state lands here in Whatcom County. Into my back yard I welcome hikers and mountain bikers, trail runners and mushroom pickers, bird watchers and paragliders, horseback riders and rock hounds, pie-nickers and skiers. I welcome street-licensed vehicles driving forest roads to access hunting, fishing, firewood cutting and non-motorized trailheads. I do NOT support bringing ORVs into the mix which could slow down or stop the recreation planning process, alienate a majority of other user groups and certainly give local residents many legitimate reasons to protest.

I encourage you to drop any consideration of ORV use on commercial forestry lands in Whatcom County and move forward with the otherwise awesome Baker to Bellingham plan.

I've lived in Whatcom County since 1979 and a lot of the time on property that is adjacent to DNR land. I'm a rather solitary person and I really enjoy the sounds of nature like the wind in the trees, chuckling of the stream and the sounds of birds and other animals. Your proposed ORV park takes those very things I love most away from me. The trails maybe within the boundaries of DNR land but the noise will be everywhere on my property. Why would you propose such a thing?

Our concerns are not hypothetical. Many Foothills residents already are dealing with the negative impacts of illegal ORV/ATV use including noise, trespassing, "mudding" in streams, cutting of trees, loud partying, verbal threats and abuse, and inappropriate shooting. Some of us have called and written to the DNR for decades begging for enforcement and rarely is there sufficient DNR staff available to even attempt a response. The idea that the DNR will all of the sudden hire enough staff officers to enforce rules and contain use on miles of sanctioned ORV trails is extremely unrealistic. This sport is incapable of managing itself and DNR does not have sufficient enforcement personal to even provide enforcement under the current situation! How much worse will it become if we actively import riders. Again, this is not hypothetical. Come and see the illegal damage on the east side of Sumas. Marketable trees have

been cut, salmon bearing streams have been driven through, many examples of causing significant erosion into salmon bearing streams and on unstable slopes etc. Don't take my word for it-let me show you! I would love to lace up my boots and walk you around. Is the DNR going to hire additional man hours to mitigate erosion and stream damage? How does that return anything to the trust? Is the DNR going to hire additional enforcement to stop damage to merchantable trees? How does paying additional salaries return anything to the trust? If they are not going to hire additional enforcement, does that mean the county is going to be left holding the bag? Not every ORV enthusiast is an irresponsible user. However, a large enough percentage of riders ARE riding irresponsibly to already be a nightmare situation for many county residents. Here is a picture from a state-wide ORV user chat room. The picture is an excerpt from a long post by a man who, at the time was a member of our Whatcom County Council! This is the attitude that we are talking about.

As a home owner on Wheeler Rd in Kendall since 2005, I am opposed to ATV/ORV trails in Whatcom County. Not only do I have serious concerns regarding noise, there would be great damage to already unstable hillsides. My experience with ORV's behind my home in the past has not been positive. As a trail runner, I would like to share the trails with runners, hikers, mountain bikers and others that are out to enjoy our beautiful and quiet land. ORV/ATV trails would be much better placed in wide open lands where less residents would be impacted and where the land can handle the severe impact of motorized vehicles.

I just learned of the Baker to Bellingham Recreation Plan and the committee planning process last Thursday, Jan 4, 2018, in an email to alert the neighborhood of the upcoming potential for significant impacts to our community from the development of recreation on Red Mountain. (I live on Silver Lake Road, approx 1/2 mile south of Silver Lake Park.) I have spent the past weekend trying to educate myself by reading through all the meeting summaries, presentations, public comments, and other materials on your website, as well as studying the suitability and "options" maps. To begin, I would like to say thank you to the Planning Committee. I appreciate all the hard work and the many hours that you have invested. It obviously has been a significant time commitment and I appreciate your willingness to engage in the process. I am very much in favor of expanded recreational opportunities here in Whatcom Co. I have been an avid outdoorsperson all my life, enjoying many different types of outdoor activities and I can appreciate the many benefits of being able to get outdoors and do the things I love. I can also really appreciate the economic benefit of increased recreation tourism, especially here in the Foothills community -- I love seeing local businesses thrive! I do have a few concerns that I would like to address: First, I am really disappointed in the apparent total lack of any outreach efforts the DNR has made to include any representation from local communities that will be affected by this Plan. It seems to me that DNR's neighbors would be important stakeholders to consult with. It appears that the only notification of this planning process was via DNR's website or via affiliation with a special interest group that might have tabs on DNR's website and (maybe) some kind of notification in the Bellingham Herald. If the DNR truly does want to be a good neighbor, it seems to me that more effort should have been made to engage directly with local residents. Not all of us follow the DNR on Facebook! Next, I am very concerned about the potential for nuisance noise related to motorized track on Red Mountain. Look at the geography of the area. The valley between Red Mtn and Black Mtn is relatively narrow. Black Mountain is steep, is higher than Red Mtn, and has a somewhat concave shape. Yes, sort

of like an amphitheater..... This should be called "Echo Valley"! Sounds are amplified as they bounce off the mountainside. The potential for a significant noise issue is very real. Contrast that to the site on Sumas Mtn: the shape of the mountain itself may have a mitigating effect, the elevation is higher than surrounding mountains, and the valley below where neighbor's homes are is significantly further from the track than those next to the Red Mtn site, all of which would make noise issues significantly less at the Sumas Mtn site.

It appears that the only consideration the Committee has given to noise issues around motorized track is in Meeting #14 (10/10/17) in the "Initial comments and questions" section of your summary:

"-Sumas Mountain motorized recreation – what about noise? *It is in the bowl area – some of it you are climbing a south aspect, but for the most part you are deflecting a lot of the noise impact. The noise will go up for the most part.*"

Where is the discussion of the potential for noise issues for the Red Mountain track?

On a personal level, the thought of the relative quiet of this valley being shattered by the whine of 2-cycle engines all summer long is, to say the least, very distressing.

On a "public good" level, what about recreational activities already occurring at Silver Lake Park? It is a very popular park, used for camping, fishing, boating, hiking, and equestrian activities. There is already a well established equestrian camp area and trails there. It makes absolutely no sense to add motorized vehicles to an area already established for equestrian use. Why spend precious resources to develop a different area for equestrian use when it is already here and could be developed further with those resources? And why introduce potential nuisance noise to a recreation area that is already well established with other uses?

Finally, I am also very concerned about the potential for increased risk of wildfire with the kind of motorized use of that you are proposing in our local forests. A wildfire on either Red or Black Mountain potentially affects a fairly large population when looking at the communities surrounding these areas. The potential for a disaster looms larger when considering the limited road access in and out of the Silver Lake and Columbia Valleys.

Our summers can be extremely dry, and the risk of fire is not just a hypothetical question, it is very real: We have had two wildfires in this community in the last few summers! We are not immune to the type of catastrophic wildfires that occurred last summer to our north in BC.

Thank you very much for the time to share my concerns. I respectfully request that you take my comments into consideration as you move forward with the planning process.

This letter is written to vehemently oppose such an amendment.

My property connects to DNR land, I have approximately 108 acres on Sumas Mountain of which 58 acres are commercial forestry.

When the DNR was preparing to log the mountain, I was asked for permission to use my access to research streams, land composites and overall tree production. I granted this permission freely and asked that the DNR also help me decrease the amount of destruction on my property from ORVs and Quads. As part of the DNR preparation, a huge mound of trees, rocks and debris was dumped on my property line to create a barrier. DNR blocked access to my property from the main DNR road and repaired the streambeds and replanted - the area has begun the process of recovery.

The ORV and quad trespassing and damage on that side of my property ceased. However, a new access was cut in by ORV and Quad owners on the other side of my property. When I had the property surveyed, Ayers survey company reported that they could not believe the egresses and damage done to the forest, streams and to my property in general including trash dumping. Once the survey was complete, signs and fences were put upon illegal egresses. Fences have since been torn down and signs are riddled with bullet holes.

7 years ago while we were working on the farm portion of our property, we had an attempted break-in to our home. The perpetrators came in from the top of Sumas Mountain and when we walked up the hill and caught them by surprise, they ran to their ORVs and left. In addition to crime, there are numerous trash sites on Sumas Mountain consisting of old motorcycle and ORV parts, wheels, garbage beds, chairs, beer cans, oil drums and other waste that should be in a landfill. This is brought in by motorized vehicles.

I have emailed and called DNR asking for assistance with ORVs and quads, with noise concerns, shooting and drinking problems and have had not one response or any DNR law enforcement. The Sheriff's office has responded, but said that they cannot do enforcement on DNR land. This fall there were squatters staying on the private property adjoining mine who entered and exited with an ORV on DNR land to be unobserved late at night. I could hear them and finally found out where they were. I have confronted men shooting directly towards my home from DNR land who said that they did not know people lived up here. Most of these encounters have been with local people and ended well, some of my neighbors have not had positive experiences and have been threatened with guns.

There is a comment from ORV/quad enthusiasts from one of these meetings that noise travels uphill. This is incorrect, on Sumas Mountain—it is amplified. I can hear ORVs, quads, private vehicles on the mountain, and gunfire as if it was inside my home. Two years ago, quads made a huge mud bog on DNR land near my property boundary and 10 acres away from my home. The noise was equivalent to being next to a race track this went on for most of a Sunday and into the night. I went up the hill to find out why the sound was not changing and found that a stream had been diverted to make the bog and a quad was stuck. The following weekend, the bog was filled with lumber and old pallets and a new road had been cut into the area as well as a new trash dump. Since this time several old trees have fallen down and the trail is not easily visible, but the bog and trash remain. The stream is beginning to reclaim its previous path.

This letter presents just a few problems that I have been dealing with over a period of 14 years. The Public Lands Commissioner, Hilary Franz, issued a statement last week urging lawmakers to adopt a carbon reducing policy and policies for the protection of trees by allowing them to grow longer, and for the protection of water and land.

Developing ORV, quad and 4x4 trails is not congruent with your own policies. Should trails be developed, only further damage will occur to our natural resources. DNR law enforcement will need to be there daily over the summer with accesses closed after dark. During the winter DNR enforcement will need to be there every Friday-Monday with the same closure time in order to prevent damage to trees, streams, land, the dumping of trash and reckless gun shooting in an area currently populated by people, bear, deer, mountain lion, coyote, ducks, geese, bald eagles etc. In addition to DNR enforcement, Border Patrol would also need to increase enforcement of the area to prevent more drug trafficking. With a network of trails legally and illegally built, the DNR would be inviting an increase in existing trafficking problems as well as inviting more criminal activity in general into the area for land owners and for County's law enforcement, EMS and Fire services to manage. Please protect our natural resources and make the area available to hiking, mushrooming, berry picking, horse and llama packing, mountain biking and those wanting peace and quiet in the natural environment. Many more people and groups will be serviced by this plan and it follows the information you collected in your surveys.

I strongly support mixed use for DNR lands –hiking, mountain bikes, horses, mushroom pickers, fishing, hunting, para-gliding, and good forest practices. I do NOT support the abuse of these lands and our community implicit in the addition of ORV's. This group has not been good neighbors, and Whatcom County is not the place for them.

My concern is not hypothetical. Many Foothills residents already are dealing with the negative impacts of illegal ORV/ATV use including noise, trespassing, "mudding" in streams, cutting of trees, loud

partying, verbal threats and abuse, and inappropriate shooting. They go around gates, cut trees, ride over tank traps and other barriers, and seek out the steepest slopes to ride. Some of us have called and written to the DNR for decades begging for enforcement and NOT ONE resident has ever gotten a response that included staff sufficient to the task. The idea that the DNR will all of the sudden hire enough staff officers to enforce rules and contain use on miles of sanctioned ORV trails is not realistic, and the idea this group will police themselves is laughable.

I oppose the designation of any ORV areas in Whatcom County, I live next to DNR land, and I vote.

I object to the Motorized Trail System proposal for many reasons but I'll focus on these 4 main areas:

1. Noise – disruptive to residences & existing recreational use.
 2. Fire risk – motorized vehicles present a serious risk to the forest, campgrounds & residential areas.
 3. Strain on EMS – we only have 1 fire station near Red Mountain. We have already approved a tax increase for EMS in Whatcom County – we do NOT have the resources to bear the additional burden.
 4. Conflict w/ existing recreational uses – equestrians trails, campgrounds, hiking trails, cyclists, fishing, etc...
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As I presume you are aware of the weather in this area has seen some of the driest, warmest weather the last 2 summers. And in view of the recent catastrophic forest fires in California, I feel having motorized vehicles and an increase of people in the woods in summer endangers my home, my animals and the natural environment.

As I have expressed my concern I will hold the Department of Natural Resources responsible for any fire in these designated areas. You took the risk and you will be held accountable.

- OHV use brings high speed vehicles.
 - This does not provide safe walking use.
 - OHV use will create only single use for these areas. OHV use should not happen.
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- Please stop planning for OHV use – it is a dumb idea.
 - Plan is for trailheads far from roads – who will maintain? Toilets etc.?
 - Clean up?
 - No mention Maple Falls park access or connection.
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Please do the following:

1. Get info from tax assessor to I.D. locations of houses to ensure you know where houses are.
 2. The Whatcom County Code limit of size of parking lot to 30 vehicles; how does that overlap with use of multi-vehicle trailers?
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I strongly object to a motorized off road park on Red Mountain or Sumas Mountain.

1. Fire hazard – already had huge brush fire caused by no spark arrestors on dirt bikes during HIGH FIRE HAZARD SEASON.
2. NO EVACUATION PLAN – no alert system in place – 1 rd. in 1 rd. out; how could us safely get everyone OUT?
3. NOISE – our valley near Silver Lake is an echo chamber – this noise will reverberate thru out the valley DAY & NIGHT
4. Loss of BALD EAGLES, they nest & hunt here in our forests and on Silver Lake, our cougars, bears &

deer will be run OFF by these loud machines.

5. ACCIDENTS – our volunteer fire fighters & EMTs are stretched past capacity! How could they cope w/ off rd accidents as well? NO CELL SERVICE. Getting help would be impossible.
6. Existing established equestrian trails – for years 4H & riding clubs have ridden on this mountain at Silver Lake horse camp! Mixing the two is a recipe for a potential fatal crash! Will you folks accept the liability for such a catastrophe? DNR? Motorcycle clubs?
7. TRESSPASSING – damage to private property when ATVs go out of bounds & they do!

I think a ORV motorized trail area will further put a strain on a ready thin ^ stressed location. I oppose it!

As a local resident, I do not want any ORV/ATV parks created or developed on DNR lands. I do not support changing the zoning laws in order to allow for the use of motorized vehicles on DNR land. I do not support the noise pollution, environmental issues, and disruption to the community that ORV/ATV parks will bring to Sumas & Red Mountains.

I am extremely concerned about the multitude of problems that ORV use on DNR land will bring to my back yard.

I am against the proposed plan for DNR land on Sumas and Red Mountain to have motorized vehicles.

We live adjacent to Red Mt. The noise pollution, environmental impact would be awful.

I am also very worried about the fire risk on Red & Sumas Mt. in summer.

I am also family medical doctor and see many injuries from ORVs. There is limited access to these areas for Emergency Medical Services.

Our family is very opposed to DNR land being used to draw non-residents with motorized vehicles into the mnts. Around our township. We have serious concerns about the support services needed to maintain and monitor their use. Fire safety has been a very big issue and also our lack of Emergency Service Staff. Horses, hikers and residents all enjoy the peace and quiet – that's why we live here.

Please do not allow ATV/ORV use on public lands! There are many reasons why – but the noise pollution & ecological damage is enough to strike this area off the table. There are better uses for these lands and ATVs/ORVs ruin it for everyone. We represent countless numbers of citizens and property owners with serious concerns about the threat of ATVs & ORVs negatively impacting our quality of life, ecological integrity & peace & quiet.

I have resided in Whatcom County for 28 years and would like to register my opposition to creation of ORV areas/parks on state land in this county.

I believe:

1. ORV users are a small minority group and ORV use is incompatible with most other recreational use.
2. ORV use adversely impacts return to the trusts through maintenance and enforcement costs and through damage to soil and timber resources.
3. Walker Valley ORV Area in Skagit County is close enough to serve Whatcom riders.