



File Code: 1950, 2720, 7730

Date: April 30, 2009

Dear National Forest User:

The Snoqualmie Ranger District of the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest is seeking comments on a proposal to grant a road easement to the Gold Hill Community Club (GHCC) for the continued use of Forest Road 7190-410 (This road is known as the 'Mine to Market Road,' 'Gold Hills Road,' or the 'Bullion Basin Road'). The easement would be granted for the purpose of authorizing access to private property under the authority of the Federal Lands Policy Management Act of October 21, 1976. The easement would require GHCC to perform all road maintenance requirements on the road to Forest Service standards.

This proposal would also close the road to public motorized use. Public motorized access to trails 1156, 1191 and 1192 would be maintained through alternative access points that already exist. No additional road or trail construction would be required.

Please consider this letter as a formal notice that the analysis for this project has begun. As a part of this process, I am requesting your comments and concerns related to this proposal. The Forest Service will use comments received from this request to determine any issues that may be related to this proposal and identify any extraordinary circumstances, should they exist.

**Background:** The 3.1 mile long Forest Road 7190-410 is located within the Upper White River watershed, on the Snoqualmie Ranger District of the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest. The road provides seasonal motorized access to Bullion Basin Trail No. 1156, Silver Creek Trail No. 1192, and Norse Peak Trail No. 1191, and is the only road that accesses the Gold Hill private lands. The land management allocation is 3C Winter Sports Resort.

The road crosses the following legally described lands in Pierce County Washington, W.M. (*See enclosed map for project location.*):

- Unsurveyed T. 17 N., R. 10 E.,  
sec. 13, NE1/4, E1/2SE1/4;
- Unsurveyed T. 17 N., R. 11 E.,  
sec. 18, W1/2SW1/4;  
sec. 19, W1/2NW1/4, W1/2SW1/4;  
sec. 30, W1/2NW1/4.

Gold Hill is an area of private land completely surrounded by National Forest System lands near the Crystal Mountain Ski Resort. Approximately 28 private landowners own property in Gold Hill, and all are members of the GHCC, the homeowner's association that has applied for an easement. Gold Hill residents have used Forest Road 7190-410 to access their private property since the area was developed in the mid 1960's. GHCC would not change their use of the Road in any way if the easement is granted.



Under a previous road use authorization, GHCC was responsible for 75% of the road maintenance and costs and the Forest Service was responsible for 25%, due to the occasional public use of the road to access Trail Nos. 1156, 1191 and 1192. With the proposed action, GHCC would assume full responsibility for road maintenance to Forest Service Standards, since the road would be closed for motorized public access. GHCC has maintained the Road for approximately 15 years and would continue to maintain it to Forest Service Standards, if the easement is granted.

**Purpose and Need:** The purpose (or objective) of this project is to authorize access to private in-holdings within the National Forest. According to the *Forest Plan*, access to private property is to be granted “in accordance with Federal rules, regulations and standards” (*Forest Plan*, page 4-138). Granting an easement would bring the use into compliance with current federal regulations and Forest Service policy for private in-holdings within the National Forest.

There is a need to reduce the miles of roads maintained by the Snoqualmie Ranger District to better match the level of funding available, and to eliminate or reduce risks of adverse environmental impacts. Assigning 100% of the road maintenance responsibility to GHCC, would provide the Snoqualmie Ranger District the opportunity to redistribute funding to other roads needing maintenance.

**Project Description:** The Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest proposes to grant a road easement to the GHCC for the use of the existing Forest Road 7190-410 near the Crystal Mountain Ski Area. The easement would be for the purpose of residential access to private property in the Gold Hill community. The easement width would be 30 feet wide (15 feet on each side of the centerline) for the 3.1 mile length of the road.

- Wheeled access would be authorized only during the summer season, May 1 to November 1. Snow removal/plowing is not proposed, nor would it be authorized. Over-the-snow access to the GHCC private lands would be included in the authorization for the winter months; however, GHCC will agree to limitations on winter-time use of the Road if additional chairlifts are added on the east side of the valley.
- The Gold Hill Community Club would continue to have access to their private land behind the existing gate near the junction of Crystal Mountain Boulevard, but the gate would be locked to public vehicular access (see attached map for gate location). Non-motorized public use of the road would not be restricted or changed by this proposal.
- The Forest Service and private landowners would develop an operation and maintenance plan for Forest Road 7190-410 from Crystal Mountain Boulevard to its terminus. GHCC would be responsible for 100% of the maintenance, and would perform all routine maintenance as specified by the Forest Service to insure the road prism remains intact and no damage occurs to the road or adjacent National Forest System land.

- Future maintenance activities would be approved within the 30 feet wide easement, generally restricted to the road prism. Representative types of maintenance include: Brushing and cutting of dead and downed logs to maintain clear and safe access, cleaning ditches, adding spot rock, and grading the road as needed. No additional clearing of trees would be allowed except for the removal of hazard trees, which would require the prior approval of the Forest Service.
- Reconstruction of the road across National Forest System land would require prior additional approval as required in the terms, provisions, and conditions of the easement to be granted.
- The easement would continue for as long as the property served is used in its current use, with review of terms and conditions after 30 years.
- The Forest Service would charge a linear right-of-way rental fee for the use of the National Forest System lands, which the GHCC would be required to pay to the U.S. Treasury.
- The Forest Service would retain administrative access rights to use the road.
- Crystal Mountain Ski Area would also maintain access rights on this road for ski area operations and maintenance through their existing Special Use Permit.

**Trail Access:** There are three trailheads served by Forest Road 7190-410. The Snoqualmie Ranger District wants to ensure that access to the trails by the public is maintained. Access to the Norse Peak, Bullion Basin and Silver Creek Trails would be maintained through the use of existing parking areas and trails.

- The Norse Peak Trail No. 1191: Trail users would continue to park near the junction of Crystal Mountain Blvd and Bullion Basin Road, and walk approximately 500 feet along the Bullion Basin Road to the trailhead.
- The Bullion Basin Trail No. 1156 and Silver Creek Trail No. 1192: Trail users would no longer be able to drive three miles up the Bullion Basin Road. As a result, access to these trails would be by an existing trail from parking lot C at Crystal Mountain Ski Area. This would add approximately 0.4 miles to the trails.

**National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA):** The Forest Service has made a preliminary assessment that granting this easement and closing the road to public motorized access fits within the Forest Service Handbook (FSH) 1909.15, Chapter 31.12, Categorical Exclusion 31.12 (7), and is therefore excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS). If it is determined through public comment or analysis that extraordinary circumstances exist that would preclude the use of this category, an EA or EIS may be prepared. Under this category, the project decision would not be subject to administrative appeal under 36 CFR 215.

**Comments:** In order to ensure your comments and concerns are considered in the analysis

process, please respond by no later than June 3, 2009. Written comments should be mailed or dropped off in person to the project leader, Miki Fujikawa, at 902 SE North Bend Way Bldg. 1, North Bend, WA 98045. Comments may also be faxed to (425) 888-1910, or e-mailed to mfujikawa@fs.fed.us. Electronic comments submitted via email must be in rich text format (.rtf) or Word (.doc). If you have any questions regarding this proposed project please contact Miki between 8:00 am to 4:30 pm Monday through Friday, excluding holidays, at (425) 888-1421, extension 241.

Comments received in response to this letter, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be considered part of the Project Record and available for public review.

Your comments are important to me. If you would like to discuss the proposed action, please feel free to contact me at (425) 888-1421, extension 230.

Sincerely,

*/s/ Jim Franzel*

JIM FRANZEL

District Ranger  
Snoqualmie Ranger District

Enclosure: Project Area Map

# Gold Hill Easement Project Area

