

1. **Title of Resolution** Spirit Lake Motorized Access Route
2. **Date Submitted**
3. **Contact Name, Affiliation, Address, Phone, E-mail**
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4. **Definition of Issue** The U.S. Forest Service (USFS) proposes to build a 2¾ mile road across the Pumice Plain for tracked drill rigs and associated vehicles to transport people and gear to collect geophysical information. The USFS would drill core samples in the debris avalanche from the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens that blocks the outlet to Spirit Lake. This road would have both short and long-term consequences to on-going and future research on the Pumice Plain where a substantial community of scientists have spent the last 30+ years studying ecosystem responses to volcanic activity. Currently, there are 33 active research studies on the Pumice Plain; most of the studies have numerous plots or are associated with long transects, cumulatively dotting the landscape to be bisected by the road. The Forest Service has rejected the alternative to use helicopters to transport the drill rigs and to require workers to walk to and from the drill sites (as scientists do to their research sites) rather than being transported by vehicle. Faced with strong opposition and the threat of litigation, the USFS withdrew its proposed decision in March 2019. A new Environmental Assessment, public comment period, and decision are anticipated in Fall 2019.
5. **What specific action are you requesting from WSACC?** Resolution
6. **What specific resources can you contribute to this action?** Writing comment letters to the USFS; providing talking points for comments during designated public comment periods.
7. **What is the deadline for a WSACC position?** September 30, 2019
8. **State your chapter's position on this issue** Support protection of the ecological and scientific values of the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument. Advocate for scientific research. Urge more thorough NEPA analysis of the proposed motorized access road to address impacts to ecological recovery and scientific research. Urge better analysis of alternatives, particularly the cost and feasibility of using helicopters for drill equipment transport and drill operators walking daily to work site.
9. **List points in support of your chapter's positions**
 - Biological uniqueness of landscape and research opportunities
 - Slowly regenerating landscape with unique biological assemblages
 - Value of the Pumice Plain as a Class I Research Area containing long-term ecological research – “research is more than plots; no possible restoration”
 - Research is one of the legislated purposes of the National Monument
 - Impacts of using heavy equipment in streams year after year to make road repairs
 - Cost of annual road repairs in dynamic landscape vs. using helicopters

10. Who takes a different position on this issue? U.S. Forest Service

11. Contact information (name & telephone) and position taken

Rebecca Hoffman, Monument Ranger

Mount St Helens National Volcanic Monument

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Build road for permanent motorized access; need access for geophysical data collection in the Spirit Lake blockage, health & safety, emergency evacuation

12. What is the rationale for different position? Cost, convenience

13. Which WSACC conservation objectives are addressed?

Reducing risks to habitat

Contributing to biological diversity

RESOLUTION
Spirit Lake Motorized Access Road

Whereas, research is considered one of the primary missions of the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument and it is recognized as the premier place in the world for volcano ecology research;

Whereas, Spirit Lake and the Pumice Plain were designated as a Class I Research Area by the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument's Comprehensive Management Plan in 1985, so scientists felt assured that their research sites would not be disturbed by future management actions;

Whereas, 33 long-term research projects covering hundreds of acres of the Pumice Plain and the south shore of Spirit Lake and extending over decades since the 1980 eruption of Mount St. Helens constitute a significant personal and public investment that could be compromised by construction, maintenance and use of a motorized access road;

Whereas, the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) proposes to build a 2¾ mile road across the Pumice Plain for tracked drill rigs and associated vehicles to transport equipment, people and gear to collect geophysical information for management of Spirit Lake and for other administrative purposes;

Whereas, the USFS violated the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) by failing to consider and fully analyze all reasonable alternatives, including the use of helicopters and foot travel, and demonstrated a distinct bias towards building a road in its 2018 Environmental Assessment, Draft Decision and Finding of No Significant Impacts;

Whereas, the USFS bias towards building a road caused inflation of the costs and frequency of heavy lift helicopter use to render the alternative unfeasible for NEPA analysis;

Whereas, the USFS persistently failed to provide a cost analysis of the use of helicopters compared to the costs associated with construction and annual maintenance of a motorized access road;

Whereas, the USFS wholly underestimated the impacts to five streams and Spirit Lake by building, maintaining and using a motorized access road in a highly erodible and dynamic landscape;

Whereas, the USFS violated NEPA by failing to take a "hard look" at the impacts of the proposed action on research;

Whereas, the proposed action is inconsistent with the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument Act's clearly expressed preference for protecting the ecological and scientific values of the Monument,

Be it Resolved, that the Washington State Audubon Conservation Committee (WSACC) endorses protection of the ecological and scientific values of the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument and opposes construction of a motorized access road across the Pumice Plain through the Class I Research Area. WSACC urges the USFS to fully consider and analyze all reasonable alternatives including the use of helicopters and foot travel to collect geophysical information.