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Forest Service unveils Olympic National Forest area plan

Public encouraged to respond to recommended changes

by Evan Mclean

Olympic National Forest may lose services and trailheads in some locations while the scope of operations may increase at other recreational sites.

The U.S. Forest Service is evaluating its developed recreation sites nationwide due to an overloaded backlog of maintenance, amounting to \$148 billion nationally.

Olympic National Forest has a backlog of \$889,329 in deferred maintenance. By evaluating recreation destinations in the forest, the federal agency may be able to meet current health and safety standards, reduce the amount of needed maintenance and increase the likelihood that maintenance will take place at the most popular areas.

“The goal of the (program) is to create a sustainable recreation program and cut the backlog in maintenance while continuing to meet the needs of our visitors,” Olympic National Forest staff officer Dean Yoshina said. “It is an elaborate process but it should realistically cause more improvements to be done in areas people routinely visit.”

In order to meet the goals of the program, park planners have created a spreadsheet of recommended changes to National Forest recreation area management, which includes closures, changes in season length, increased or decreased fees and changes in use overall.

The Forest Service held a public meeting May 20 at Carrie Blake Park to hear what local residents thought of the plan. Those who were unable to attend the meeting are encouraged to read the plan online and provide

comments of proposed changes and tell the Forest Service which areas they regularly use.

Residents also are encouraged to let the Forest Service know which trails are regularly used as part of their public comments.

Sequim area changes include reducing the amount of time certain trailheads are open, including the Mount Zion Trail, the Slab Camp Trail and the Upper and Lower Dungeness trails.

“A change in season means the Forest Service will only maintain certain areas through the spring and summer,” Yoshina said, indicating exact dates vary with different sites. “This doesn’t mean the areas are closed to the public, we will just hone overall maintenance to when the areas are getting the most usage.”

Not all changes are reductions in service. The Mount Townsend trailhead could see an increase in service, with the addition of a restroom facility. Along with the improvement, however, the plan would introduce a fee to use the Mount Townsend Trail.

The plan also invited third-party companies to come in and manage campground facilities.

“We already have some sites operated and maintained by an outside agency, like camp-

grounds in the Quinault area,” Yoshina said. “The third-party business would pay us for the ability to run the site and would collect campground fees and make sure the area is kept up. That way the public gets their campgrounds cleaned up and the Forest Service begins to gain funds to do backlog of major improvements, like sign replacement, picnic tables and fire rings.”

The plan will decommission three sites in the forest, the Interrorem picnic area, the Lower Quilcene trailhead and one ranger kiosk.

A complete list of changes slated within the plan is available online at www.fs.fed.us/r6/olympic.

The site also includes ways to update the Forest Service on what areas are used more than their surveys have found.

Comments on the changes proposed for Olympic National Forest can be sent to Brad Paul at bpaul@fs.fed.us through Friday, May 23.

[WSNFC Note: The deadline had already passed before this article appeared.]