

January 9, 2023

Dear Director Knox,

On behalf of the Whatcom County Parks and Recreation Commission, I am writing to express our continued support for the Bellingham-Mt. Baker trail. At our meeting on November 17, 2022, we unanimously passed a resolution to provide written support for the trail, building upon previous letters of endorsement by this Commission in 2015 and 2018. Since 2018, certain challenges have come to light that we would like to bring to your attention, as well as to the Executive and staff who may be involved in planning efforts – namely, the need to engage with the county's tribal partners in developing this trail.

The proposed trail traverses through lands administered by various jurisdictions, including the City of Bellingham, Whatcom County, the Washington Department of Natural Resources, and the USDA Forest Service. According to the Washington State Department of Natural Resources' Baker to Bellingham Non-Motorized Recreation Plan, DNR is willing to participate in trail planning if a planning committee of stakeholders is formed. In order to move the project forward, it is necessary that DNR receive support from the Lummi Nation, the Nooksack Tribe, and other Washington State tribes. This is especially important given the challenges outlined in the Tulalip Tribe's 2021 report, "The 'Recreation Boom' on Public Lands in Western Washington: Impacts to Wildlife and Implications for Treaty Tribes." The report notes that tribes recognize the popularity of recreation in the Pacific Northwest, its health and economic benefits, and its potential to inspire public support for land conservation. It also states that the increasing popularity of recreation in the Puget Sound region has the potential to impact natural areas and tribes' treaty rights.

With this in mind, the Commission:

- Emphasizes the importance of engaging with and receiving support from the Lummi Nation, the Nooksack Tribe, and other Washington State tribes in order to move this project forward in a way that respects their rights. This includes finding ways to collaborate on recreation and trail planning, seeking input and feedback from tribal representatives, and addressing concerns they may have. Additionally, tribes should be apprised of the economic and health benefits that this trail will offer.
- Recommends discussing the project with the Whatcom County Council during a scheduled Natural Resources Committee meeting. This should include sharing information about the history of the trail and various planning documents that detail the trail plan. The Whatcom County Council voted the trail into the Comprehensive Plan in 2016.

We hope that the Bellingham-Mt. Baker trail project can move forward in a way that benefits all stakeholders and respects the rights of Washington's treaty tribes.

Sincerely,

Sonja Max  
Chair, Whatcom County Parks and Recreation Commission