

DRAFT

December 15th, 2022

RE: Bellingham-Mt. Baker Trail

To: The Honorable Satpal Singh Sidhu and the Whatcom County Council,

I am writing as Chair of the Whatcom County Parks and Recreation Commission. At its November 17th meeting, the Commission unanimously voted to forward a letter in support of the Bellingham-Mt. Baker Trail to you. This letter is intended to highlight the need for Whatcom County government to engage with our tribal neighbors, on behalf of its residents, to address the tribes' concerns over habitat and recreation challenges and to look for opportunities to work together.

The Commission acknowledges the traditional, ancestral, unceded territory of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the Lummi, Nooksack, Semiahmoo, and Samish.

The Bellingham-Mt. Baker trail builds upon the work of Whatcom County, its residents, and the USDA Forest Service dating back to 1909. The current vision for the trail was included in Whatcom County's comprehensive plan in 2016. That same year the trail was added to the City of Bellingham's PRO Plan. The trail was included in DNR's Baker to Bellingham Non-Motorized Recreation Plan in 2019. Objective B states that DNR is willing to participate in trail planning, for example, on the Whatcom County conceptual Bellingham-Mt. Baker Trail, that may result in trail development on DNR land should another state agency, local government body, or organized group of individuals convene a planning committee of stakeholders. Additionally the trail was included in the Recreational Assets of Statewide Significance in Washington State Study Report by the Washington State Recreation and Conservation Office in 2019.

A 2021 report by the Tulalip Tribe titled "The Recreation Boom" on Public Lands in Western Washington: Impacts to Wildlife and Implications for Treaty Tribes notes that, "With continued rapid population growth throughout the Puget Sound region, impacts from recreation are expected to increase. Tribes recognize the popularity of recreation here in the Pacific Northwest, its health and economic benefits, and its potential to inspire public support for land conservation. However, the sheer volume of recreational use in our region threatens to undermine efforts to sustain the health of these same natural areas that are so valued."

The Whatcom County Parks Commission sees the potential benefit of the Bellingham Mt. Baker trail in its ability to open a dialogue concerning treaty rights and recreation. Not only would the trail connect a string of public lands, it may aid in connecting the people who share these lands. Trails are a space where people build friendships, community, and a sense of place within the natural world. For these values and more, the Commission makes a request of our elected leaders and government officials to invite the tribes of the Point Elliot Treaty to the table to cooperatively plan for the trail.

Thank you for considering our request.

Respectfully,

Sonja Max
Chair, Whatcom County Parks and Recreation Commission