

Dosewallips Washout

July 17, 2006

Over three hundred feet of the Dosewallips road on Olympic National Forest washed out in January 2002, about 10 miles west of Highway 101 at Brinnon and five miles shy of its end at Muscott Flat. Since that time, a great deal of community debate and bureaucratic to-and-fro have taken place in determining the proper method of responding to this dilemma. The washout itself has now grown to 600 feet in length from successive winter storms.

The Forest Service has twice completed environmental assessments to reconstruct the road, through either the river's floodplain or on the steep slope above. The first proposal was dropped due to concerns regarding critical habitat for threatened Puget Sound Chinook and violation of the Northwest Forest Plan's Aquatic Conservation Strategy. The agency's subsequent decision to re-route the road upslope of the washout was withdrawn following a formal appeal by OFCO, Olympic Park Associates, Olympic Peninsula Audubon Society, and two individuals. Concerns with the upslope re-route include logging of old-growth trees, destruction of critical habitat for the Northern Spotted Owl, incursion into the Buckhorn Wilderness, and wet, unstable terrain.

OFCCO has repeatedly advocated for converting the final five miles of the Dosewallips Road above the washout into a non-motorized trail, and public consensus has steadily developed among recreational advocates (including Washington Trails Association) for such an outcome. Nevertheless, the Forest Service (at the explicit direction of USFS Supervisor Dale Hom and Park Service Superintendent Bill Laitner) is publishing a new environmental impact statement that will study again several options for harmful road reconstruction, while purposely ignoring the public's desire for a closer look at the needed road-to-trail conversion.

In March 2006, OFCCO board members John Woolley and Jim Scarborough hiked the full length of the Dosewallips Road above the washout for a firsthand look at the present conditions there. We found terrific river, canyon, and mountain scenery along what would make a superb three-season trail. The photos below document our visit that day.



"Problem" Creek across Dosewallips road, one mile prior to the big washout.



Main Dosewallips road washout from the east. The river now flows where the road once was.



Main Dosewallips road washout from the west. The Forest Service's "instream" reconstruction alternative would build a road directly through the river here.



Eroding cut above Dose road.



Rock slide across Dose road in Dosewallips Canyon.



Road failure above Dosewallips River.



Plugged culvert along Dose road.



Road washout eroding into Dosewallips Falls in national park.



Failing gabions (wire cages of rock) above Dosewallips Falls.



An example of 300-year-old Douglas-fir that would be logged on the Dosewallips if upslope road reconstruction were allowed to occur.



Despite the claims of road reconstruction advocates, recreationists still flock to the Dosewallips, as shown by the many parked cars at the washout.