

Dosewallips Road Washout Update

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The U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, and Federal Highway Administration published the Dosewallips Road Washout draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) in mid-2008, which proposed reconstructing this controversial road through either centuries-old ancient forest on an unstable slope, or through critical salmon habitat. In response to the DEIS, as described in our previous newsletter, 72 percent of over 500 public comments—a record for Olympic National Forest—rejected the agencies' intent.

A clear majority of the public is in favor of converting the final five miles of road beyond the washout into a scenic, three-season, non-motorized trail. The same is true of regional tribes, state agencies, and even other federal agencies charged with reviewing this project. The onus is now on the lead agencies to properly respond to the public will.

The Forest Service has recently informed OFCO that the three lead agencies will meet in January to determine a preferred alternative for the Dosewallips washout. Afterward, this alternative will go to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service for consultation, which could take up to four months. The Forest Service currently estimates the final EIS will be published in midsummer 2009, followed by another 30-day comment period. A "record of decision" will be signed by Olympic National Forest Supervisor Dale Hom shortly thereafter.

Although Mr. Hom and the Park Service have shown signs of digging in their heels on reconstructing the Dosewallips Road despite the severe (and likely illegal) environmental devastation that would result, we're maintaining a modicum of optimism that the lead agencies will eventually acknowledge and pursue the public's chosen direction. There would be great risk to the well-being of the Dosewallips River, as well as to the trust accorded to the lead agencies by the public, if a belated attempt to punch this road through occurs. Let's hope for better things.



*Conservation legend Polly Dyer (in foreground), with Bonnie Phillips and Tim McNulty, visiting her namesake ancient forest grove currently threatened by reconstruction of the Dosewallips Road.
Photo by John Woolley*