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Federal Highway Administration

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May 31, 2012

In Reply Refer To: HFL-17

FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT
For
Proposed Improvements to Middle Fork Snoqualmie River Road
WA PFH 29-1(1)
King County, Washington

The Western Federal Lands Highway Division of the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has determined that the selected course of action for the reconstruction of a 9.7-mile segment of the Middle Fork Snoqualmie River Road (Middle Fork Road), located just east of the city of North Bend, Washington, will have no significant impact on the human environment. The selected course of action is described as the Preferred Alternative in the *Middle Fork Snoqualmie River Road Project, WA PFH 29-1(1), Environmental Assessment* (FHWA, March, 2012), referred hereafter as the EA.

This project is being developed as part of the Forest Highways' category of the FHWA Public Lands Highway Program, which is financed by the Federal Highway Trust Fund. FHWA is the lead agency for National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) compliance for this road reconstruction project. In addition to NEPA compliance, FHWA will complete project design, issue a construction contract, and administer the actual construction. FHWA is developing this project in cooperation with the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and King County.

BACKGROUND AND NEED

The Middle Fork Road serves as the only motorized access to the Middle Fork Snoqualmie River valley, a popular recreation area located less than an hour's drive from the Seattle metropolitan area. The area provides a wide range of recreational opportunities, including hiking, mountain biking, kayaking, rafting, swimming, hunting, fishing, camping, and other activities. Traffic on the roadway would likely increase as the population of the region continues to grow, and due to the recent development of a new campground at the eastern end of the project area. Because of the high recreational use and lack of facilities, uncontrolled recreational access and use occur at numerous locations in the project area, damaging the natural environment, including riparian and other sensitive areas. The lack of designated travel lanes encourages parking along and within the roadway near recreational areas, often constricting the roadway to a single lane.

Numerous problems along the road pose challenges for the traveling public and the maintaining agencies. The existing road contains narrow roadway segments; poor drainage occurs in areas; and erosion, landslides, and rockfall create maintenance problems and prevent access at times. The road varies from a single-lane, 12-foot wide roadway to a two-lane roadway more than

30 feet wide. Long, wide, straight sections of the road that encourage high vehicle speeds are followed by sharp curves and narrow segments, which is counter to drivers' expectations. The gravel surface requires frequent maintenance, and it often becomes rutted and wash boarded after rain events, due to poor road conditions. Two of the bridges in the project area have documented problems, and numerous culverts on the project act as barriers to fish passage.

The purpose of the proposed project is to improve the Middle Fork Road's operational safety and reduce excessive annual maintenance efforts while improving access to recreational opportunities. To meet this purpose, several conditions of Middle Fork Road require relief, including the following: varying, inconsistent roadway widths; a substandard driving surface that has potholes, wash boarding, and loose gravel; excessive maintenance needs and cost; insufficient drainage; inadequate road warning signage; and lack of designated travel lanes. Partner agencies, other federal and state agencies, and the public identified additional considerations that the proposed project should attempt to meet. The considerations include the following:

- Completing improvements in a cost effective manner
- Minimizing impacts on natural habitat, aesthetics, water quality, and recreation
- Improving fish passage when feasible
- Including feasible measures to discourage excessive speeds

SELECTED (PREFERRED) ALTERNATIVE

The selected alternative is shown as the Preferred Alternative in the EA. The Preferred Alternative will reconstruct approximately 9.7 miles of the Middle Fork Road, from Milepost (MP) 2.7 just past the couplet to the Middle Fork Campground at MP 12.4. The Preferred Alternative would create a 20-foot paved roadway width with sections of 18-foot width used in constrained locations. Minor horizontal and vertical alignment adjustments would be made as needed to help promote a design that would improve safety and blend with the context of the valley. Rather than excessively alter the existing alignment, traffic control devices would be placed at some of the tighter curves to improve safety and warn motorists of roadway conditions. Retaining walls and shoulder stabilization may be used in areas where short walls or steeper slopes would help reduce impacts on either the fill side or cut side of the road. Potential placement of guardrails in these sections would be evaluated and used based on stabilization design. Slopes would be seeded with native species following the completion of construction. The overall roadway area after construction would total approximately 1.6 acres less than the existing roadway. Annual maintenance needs would be lowered as the paved surface would better hold up to traffic levels and weather conditions.

Under the Preferred Alternative, many of the existing culverts would be replaced or would be subject to maintenance to restore function. Existing culverts that could not survive a 100-year flood would be replaced with larger culverts that could pass such a flood event, including associated bedload and debris. Five culverts would be replaced with larger culverts at small stream locations to facilitate fish passage that is currently impeded. The large concrete bridge spanning the Middle Fork Snoqualmie River at MP 5.7 would remain in its current condition

except for surface treatments and the addition of approach guardrail, which would help preserve the existing structure. The small 20-foot concrete bridge at MP 6.0 has deteriorated abutments and substandard railing. This bridge would be replaced with a 19-foot by 6-foot concrete box culvert. The timber log bridge at MP 8.4 is functionally obsolete and structurally deficient due to its decayed condition, and it would be replaced. The concrete bridge at MP 10.6 would be replaced as scour has undermined it at its abutments. Pile driving would be required at MP 8.4 and MP 10.6. A temporary detour bridge may be constructed immediately adjacent to the existing bridges at MP 6.0 and 8.4 to accommodate traffic during replacement of these structures. In-water work would be restricted to expected low-flow periods to minimize potential erosion and sedimentation within streams.

Areas where the roadway could be overtopped by flood events would be redesigned to accommodate a 100-year flood event (including associated bedload and debris) without overtopping. This would effectively reduce potential roadway erosion and closure during flood events. Appropriate raising and armoring of the roadway where this risk exists may be included as feasible in an attempt to prevent a roadway embankment failure during high flows. Sufficient culverts and crossdrains would be included to maintain hydrology through these areas. At MP 10.2, an alluvial debris fan has damaged and closed the road in the past. Concrete low water crossings would be installed at this site to accommodate expected future debris flows resulting from future storm events, minimizing damage to, and facilitating removal of, material from the roadway.

Blasting of existing rock slopes would potentially be required at up to five locations under the Preferred Alternative to accommodate the roadway width within existing narrow roadway sections and to create rockfall catchment ditches. Rock cuts would be performed to mimic natural rock faces to the extent practicable. Rockfall catchment ditches would be revegetated with native species.

Coordination among FHWA, United States Department of Agriculture Forest Service (USFS), King County, and Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR) has occurred to assist in identifying key areas of existing pullouts and parking, such as those that exist near the Mailbox Peak Trailhead and Mine Creek day-use area. As currently designed, identified key areas of existing pullouts and parking would be maintained should the Preferred Alternative be implemented. Improvements to existing pullout and parking areas, such as paving and widening, may occur as part of the project if funding is available, though these areas would not appreciably increase the amount of impervious surface and would not extend outside the construction limits examined as part of this EA.

Construction of the Preferred Alternative would take approximately 2.5 years. Construction activities would take place between approximately February and December subject to weather and timing restrictions to protect wildlife. Truck trips would occur irregularly throughout the project construction period. On some days, there would be little or no construction truck traffic traveling through the Edgewick area just outside the northeast end of North Bend. On other days, when certain construction activities such as surfacing and paving operations would occur,

construction traffic would be more frequent since more materials would be required during such operations.

It would be the Contractor's responsibility to obtain necessary materials for construction from commercial sources or sources that have all appropriate clearances and permits. Materials imported onto the project site would have to be certified as weed-free. Potential sites within the project corridor, such as pullout areas and existing trailheads, may be used as staging areas for equipment staging and material stockpiles. Use of these sites may reduce parking capacity at areas where public access would be allowed during construction, potentially affecting visitors' use of these sites. Construction traffic would be restricted to state legal loads and restricted to the upper portion of the couplet as long as access was available through the upper portion. Damage to the upper couplet's roadway surfacing resulting from hauling operations would be repaired as needed.

Road reconstruction activities under the Preferred Alternative would require road closures for efficient roadway reconstruction. Closures would vary throughout construction depending on the work location and the type of activities. Timed closures may occur daily, weekly, seasonally, and by location to minimize impacts on the public. For example, closures may be time-limited to weekday business hours to maintain access to some recreation sites in the evenings, may occur for a work week (Monday to Friday) to accommodate construction activities and allow for public recreation on the weekends, or full closures may occur in the fall when there are fewer visitors. Closures may also occur by location, such as at the concrete bridge, to accommodate more intensive and lengthy construction activities that would impede safe travel along the route, or when allowing access would delay completing work, such as with blasting and bridge replacement activities. The current plan would be to open the road for public access on weekends (2:00 p.m. Friday through 10:00 a.m. Monday), though as noted above access may be restricted at times to just a portion of the project area when the entire road cannot safely be opened to public traffic. The longest anticipated closure area would be the bridge replacement at MP 10.6, which may require up to an 8-week closure before vehicle access through the area could be restored. Local agency, landowner, and in-holder needs would be accommodated when possible. A public information plan with information concerning potential closures and delays would be written and distributed to the public. It would detail posting delays and closure periods on a weekly basis to the project website.

Implementation of the Preferred Alternative would require an easement transfer from USFS and DNR to the maintaining agency, King County. Where the project passes through private property and additional right-of-way (ROW) would be needed, King County would acquire the additional easements. ROW/easement transfer area requirements identified within the EA are based on construction limits for the Preferred Alternative. Final areas required for easement transfers would be dependent on agreements reached between King County and the USFS and DNR. Property acquisitions would be performed in accordance with applicable provisions of the Uniform Relocation and Real Property Act of 1970 (Public Law [PL] 91-646) and the Uniform Relocation Act Amendment of 1987 (PL 100-17). Areas under consideration for ROW acquisitions would consist of land only; no structures exist within these areas.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

The EA was made available for public review and comment from early April to early May 2012. A public open house was held on April 18, 2012, with approximately 20 attendees. Public comments received by project staff at the open house were generally favorable. During the public comment period 16 emails were received, 14 of which expressed support for the Preferred Alternative. Comments were generally regarding particular parking areas, with some additional comments regarding controlling speed, noxious weed control, and publicizing information on construction closures and delays.

ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

The EA analyzed the effects of the proposed action on numerous resources including: land use; social environment, including traffic, community character; cultural resources; section 4(f); recreation; noise; visual quality; water resources; soils and geology; vegetation; wildlife; fisheries; and cumulative impacts for all these topics. No significant impacts to these resources were identified. These findings are based on the evidence and conclusions set forth in the EA, and incorporate those conclusions by reference here, as clarified within the attached *Response to Comments*. All applicable permits will be obtained prior to construction.

CONCLUSION

FHWA finds the EA, including the attached *Response to Comments*, and related documentation adequately and accurately addresses the need, environmental issues, impacts of the proposed action, and contains appropriate mitigation measures. Furthermore, FHWA finds that the EA, including the information listed above, documents full compliance with the NEPA and other related environmental laws, executive orders, and implementing regulations. The EA with the supplemental information in this FONSI provides sufficient evidence and analyses for determining that the proposed project will have no significant impact on the environment and that an Environmental Impact Statement is not required.

RECOMMENDED BY:

David K. Kennedy
Environmental Program Manager

May 31, 2012
Date

APPROVED BY:

Robert B. Lale, III
Director of Project Delivery
Western Federal Lands Highway Division
Federal Highway Administration

5/31/12
Date

RESPONSE TO COMMENTS

Public comment #1

Based on the design, we believe and request, the speed limit for the entire Middle Fork and Lake Dorothy road be reduced to 25 MPH. A speed greater than that is not compatible with the current use nor will it be for projected traffic volume increases and other recreational uses such as bicycling and walkingWe believe there will be a very significant increase in road bike usage once the road is paved, with the road being narrowed the speed limit should also reflect a scenic forest road experience A speed limit of 25 MPH would also reduce the risk of injury or death to wildlife in the valley by improving driver reaction times.

Response #1

While the road is being designed for a 35 mph speed, King County, as the maintaining agency, will ultimately be the agency responsible in setting the speed limit on the route. On-going discussion between the partner agencies regarding the speed limit and traffic calming continue and include discussion on posting the route at a lower speed limit.

Public Comment #2

Although not directly addressed in the Environmental Assessment, we would suggest fog lines be added to the road beside a center line. This would not only improve safety during poor visibility, if applied a foot from the edge of the asphalt it would give the feeling of a narrower road thus slowing vehicle traffic and improving the margin of safety for bikes and walkers along the road.

Response #2

As noted above, on-going discussions between the partner agencies regarding traffic calming measures continue. As the maintaining agency, King County will ultimately be the deciding agency for which traffic calming measures will be included as part of the proposed project.

Public Comment #3

I therefore recommend the subject of the speed limit and fog lines be added to the final document.

Response #3

Decisions on the final speed limit and inclusion of fog lines have yet to be made but the potential inclusion or exclusion of these elements would be decisions on the part of the maintaining agency of the route, King County. The inclusion or exclusion of these elements would not change the effects of the Preferred Alternative as discussed in the EA.

Public Comment #4
Additional parking spaces would be beneficial for whitewater access between stations 235 and 240. 8 spaces are proposed and one dozen spaces would be more realistic.

Response #4
As discussed within the EA, existing pullout areas would be preserved when they do not extend into the roadway and present a safety risk. Improvements to existing parking areas would occur as funding was available and based on coordination with the partner agencies and DNR. Preliminary parking areas presented at the last open house were based on identified areas of existing parking that the partner agencies and DNR, as well as the public and interested parties, had identified as needing continued parking. FHWA and the project partners, along with DNR, continue to have discussions regarding expanding potential parking within the Mine Creek area, including potentially adding additional spots to the proposed eight-vehicle parking area at Station 238 and also adding a parking area at the Mine Creek gate at Station 243 to accommodate several vehicles.

Public Comment #5
Also, 12 spaces near Bridge 359D is not sufficient for whitewater access. A total of 25 spaces would be sufficient at the bridge.

Response #5
Parking at the Russian Butte View area just past bridge 359D includes formalizing the existing informal parking area to accommodate approximately 5 vehicles and adding an additional parking area accommodating approximately 8 vehicles, representing a substantial increase in parking in this area.

There is no current plan to create a parking area of such substantial size to accommodate 25 vehicles at this location as part of this project.

Public Comment #6
Also, there should ideally be specified closure hours on the road during construction. These closures and construction progress would be useful on a website.

Response #6
As discussed in the EA, a public information plan with information concerning closures and delays would be made available and detail how and where weekly updates on delays and closures would be made available to the public, such as on a project website.

Public Comment #7
Any plans for the Dutch Miller Trailhead as part of this project?

Response #7
Improvements to the Dutch Miller Trailhead are not proposed as part of this project.

Public Comment #8
Though there is already substantial traffic, a paved road will just bring more people, and occasionally people that are not there to be stewards of the trail or river system. The DNR and USFS budgets are down, so who is going to clean up the garbage and/or monitor use.

Response #8
King County will be the responsible maintaining agency of the road. DNR and USFS activities as the landowners would continue management activities. Advocacy and recreational user groups may continue to coordinate with agencies to undertake garbage clean-up activities along the route.

Public Comment #9
I am specifically concerned about the proposed parking area near station 235_00 and station 240_00-- shoulder parking as is is preferable-- for 10 cars.

Response #9
As stated in Response #4, FHWA and project partners will continue to look at potential parking within the Mine Creek area, including potentially adding additional spots to the proposed 8-vehicle parking area at Station 238 and also adding a parking area at the Mine Creek gate at Station 243 to accommodate several additional vehicles. The total parking in these two areas would exceed 10 vehicles.

Public Comment #10
I am worried that there won't be enough parking spaces provided at the popular "put ins" and "take outs" for kayakers - I don't think there are quite enough to serve the use that these busy spots get.

Response #10
As discussed within the EA, existing pullout areas would be preserved when they do not extend into the roadway and present a safety risk. Improvements to existing parking areas would occur as funding was available and based on coordination with the partner agencies and DNR. Preliminary parking areas presented at the last open house were based on identified areas of existing parking that the partner agencies and DNR, as well as the public and interested parties, had identified as needing continued parking. At the popular Mine Creek and Lake Dorothy Bridge put-in areas, formalized parking areas adjacent to the road are included as part of the Preferred Alternative to replace the existing informal parking that occurs in these areas, which often impinges into the roadway. As stated in the EA, the primary purpose of this project is to improve operational safety on the route and reduce maintenance costs and efforts. While additional parking spaces may be warranted to accommodate peak use periods, the purpose of this project is not to provide current and future peak parking capacity along the whole route. The land management agencies, DNR and the Forest Service, would be the responsible entities for determining future expansion and/or development of parking areas along the route beyond those determined to be included as part of the proposed action.

Public Comment #11

I understand that many areas have terrain constraints but encourage doing whatever is possible at the paddler's most heavily uses area - "Island Drop" which is just downstream of Mine Creek. Paddlers currently park between 235 and 240. Until the Mine Creek gate is open and cars can drive in there for parking during the day, paddlers will park instead along the road closest to the stream, where the easiest access is. If any additional space along the road can be made safe for paddlers to walk from where the proposed parking spaces are, to that area, that will improve safety for everyone. Perhaps also additional signing to that area from either direction, to indicate slower speeds or at least caution.

Response #11

See Response #4 and Response #9.

Public Comment #12

I also encourage the sharing of the public involvement plan with paddlers before it is finalized. River access needs on the MF Snoqualmie river will be dependent on flow levels, which vary considerably each year. If some flexibility can be built in to ensure access to certain spots during perhaps additional evenings for certain periods of time, that would considerably reduce the short-term construction impacts to recreational use for paddlers.

Response #12

See Response #6.

Public Comment #13

Please ensure that all stated mitigation measures are actually implemented as stated. We expect complete adherence to erosion control and water quality protections as stated to ensure that no changes to the riverbed will occur, especially at areas where the current whitewater features make the river such an important resource (for example, just downstream of "Island Drop").

Response #13

Mitigation measures such as erosion and sediment control and water quality protections will be required as part of the construction contract for the proposed project. No impacts to whitewater features are expected.

Back Country Horsemen of Washington Comment #1

We do have a concern with there being only 20' of paved width. Trailer towing maximum width vehicles may mean on-coming traffic passing vehicles can come uncomfortably close to each other, particularly when sight distance is limited. It may be that engineering in adequate shoulders and strategic pullouts can address this concern.

Response to the Back Country Horsemen of Washington Comment #1

During project scoping overwhelming public response regarding minimizing environmental impacts and maintaining the rural character of the existing road led to the development of a 20-foot typical width (with some sections of 18-foot width), as allowed by roadway standards and acceptable to the partner agencies. Narrow sections and curves will be appropriately signed and caution should of course be exercised by all

drivers, especially those of oversized vehicles and trailers, to drive in a safe and prudent manner.

The Wilderness Society Comment #1

We support the comments submitted by Mid-FORC regarding support for the measures in the Preferred Alternative that address and minimize invasive plant impacts and the additional measures that they recommend. Now that the proposed project has been selected as a result of the NEPA process, pre-treatment of noxious weeds may proceed.

Response to the Wilderness Society Comment #1

FHWA has begun working on an agreement with the USFS to proceed with pre-treatment of the project corridor. Revegetation efforts will be implemented as part of the construction project. Ongoing management of the area post-construction will be the responsibility of the maintaining agency (King County) and the land management agencies (DNR and USFS).

MidFORC Comment #1

We understand that while FHWA will grade and (perhaps pave) parking areas, important work is left to the land managers. This includes construction of bathroom, kiosks, signs, as well as some additional parking. It's critical to get this additional work in the pipeline, both to leverage the FHWA contribution and to ensure that good facilities are in place when the project is complete: This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to develop a string of well designed, well-sited facilities.

Response to MidFORC Comment #1

FHWA continues to work with the partner agencies and DNR to coordinate proposed site improvements that would be included as part of this project or that are anticipated in the future.

MidFORC Comment #2

<u>187 - 190 Mailbox Peak Trailhead</u>

Alignment should allow as much room as possible on the south side of the road for parking, and the long-proposed valley entry-way. The new trailhead will be closed in the off-season, but increasingly this is a 3 and 4-season recreation site. Parking by the road should be maximized to handle recreation traffic for Mailbox, Granite Creek, and Grouse basin. Without such parking, drivers will park up and down the road, as they do now. School buses and public transit may use this trailhead, so at minimum will need room to drop-off passengers and turnaround.

Response to MidFORC Comment #2

Preliminary plans call for expansion of the existing parking area on the north side of the road and a current FHWA-funded enhancement project for a formalized upper Mailbox Peak trailhead and parking area is set to begin construction this year. FHWA will continue to work with the partner agencies and DNR to investigate the possibility of improving parking at the existing parking on the south side of the road at Mailbox Peak.

MidFORC Comment #3

243 - 244 Mine Creek Gate Expand parking to handle 10 vehicles.

Response to MidFORC Comment #3

During reviews of a preliminary design, FHWA began and will continue working with the partner agencies and DNR to develop expanded parking at this location.

MidFORC Comment #4

287-295 Champion Beach Close the current parking location. Access to the beach from that location is via a steep wet slope, so causes significant erosion. Instead parking should be provided up the road (see below).

Response to MidFORC Comment #4

Preliminary plans currently calls for elimination of this informal parking area.

MidFORC Comment #5

298-299? Champion cont. Provide parking for 10 vehicles in the vicinity of the old Champion logging road. We understand that DNR will apply for a grant to plan and build trail access, and currently FHWA has no plan to provide the parking. However, regardless of who provides the parking, it should be a high priority. If no parking exists when road work is completed, no doubt users will gouge out parking, and predictably, in a terrible location that will be difficult to close.

Response to MidFORC Comment #5

FHWA continues to work with DNR on the location and size of potential parking in the Champion Beach area. If a location is determined prior to completion of project development it may still be included as part of this project.

MidFORC Comment #6

320 - 325 Concrete Bridge The parking by the raft access trail should be signed as no parking except for gear drop-off.

Response to MidFORC Comment #6

FHWA will work with the partner agencies and DNR on determining signage that will be installed as part of this project.

MidFORC Comment #7

433 Bessemer Gate The project maps show no parking at the Bessemer gate. As this is the main access point along the Middle Fork road for the CCC trail and Bessemer, existing parking should be retained for 3-4 vehicles, and ideally expanded on the west edge of the clearing to allow 6-8 vehicles. At the same time, the perimeter of the parking area should be blocked to keep off-road vehicles from ripping up the hillside to bypass the Bessemer gate (as they do now).

MidFORC Comment #8

The Oxbow trail is likely to be popular with school groups, so at minimum will need room for a bus drop-off and turnaround. If not possible at the proposed locations, then please provide room at the Bessemer gate parking.

Response to MidFORC Comment #8
FHWA will continue to work with the partner agencies on addressing access needs along the route and potential placement of any bus turnarounds.

MidFORC Comment #9
Visitors usually walk the Oxbow trail as a loop. One end is at the existing 3- vehicle parking, the other at a grown-over pullout several hundred feet SW of the Bessemer gate. A trail parallel to the road will be needed to link up both ends of the loop and keep hikers off the road. The road alignment should not preclude such a trail.

Response to MidFORC Comment #9
FHWA will continue to work with the partner agencies on addressing access needs along the route. The Preferred Alternative is not expected to preclude future placement of a trail at this location.

MidFORC Comment #10
480 Russian Butte View
Is the proposed parking area for 8 vehicles (to the west) also for Russian Butte View? We support that if boaters think it's needed. However, if not, we're concerned that it would turn into another destination for the pallet burning party crowd.

Response to MidFORC Comment #10
The intent of the proposed parking area is to serve the Russian Butte View area. FHWA will continue to work with the partner agencies to determine if this proposed parking area is needed.

MidFORC Comment #11
645 Camp Brown We support the proposed parking for 13 vehicles. Other recreation ideas that could influence parking needs at Camp Brown include: kayak access on the upstream side via a new trail, general beach access on the downstream side via a new trail, and an interpretive area (the site was a major logging camp). So depending on the Forest Service's plan for Camp Brown, 13 may be too few.

Response to MidFORC Comment #11
The Forest Service currently has no proposed improvements for the Camp Brown area.

MidFORC Comment #12
655 (or 658?) Bridge View In the past boaters have requested parking for 6 or more vehicles. If only 2 are provided, they may request a gear drop off area, and a trail to the main parking lot. Or perhaps access from Camp Brown would be a suitable replacement.

Response to MidFORC Comment #12
FHWA and the partner agencies have not received any input from boaters regarding additional parking needs at this site but will consider input moving forward with the proposed project.

MidFORC Comment #13

Middle Fork Trailhead If FHWA uses the west lobe of the parking lot for a staging area, then when the project is complete, would be very good to re-grade the lobe as part of final clean up. Currently it looks like a construction/gravel site, blighted and weedy. Would be a huge improvement to form islands in the middle and plant them with trees and shrubs (like the east lobe). Another improvement would be to create a small picnic area (good for trailhead security if tired hikers stick around a while). Of course, the lobe should continue to accommodate equestrian parking.

Response to MidFORC Comment #14

Should the site be used for staging it would be retored to existing conditions at project completion. FHWA will work with the Forest Service to determine any proposed improvements to the site.

MidFORC Comment #14

Consider 18 foot width in areas likely to attract speeding (long straight stretches), not just in areas where the width is a byproduct of design constraints...We are concerned that once construction is complete, good options may be precluded. What design measures is King County likely to exclude? Also, if fog lines are too costly to maintain for the entire roadway, can they be applied in areas likely to attract speeding? Since King County is concerned that fog lines won't hold up to Middle Fork conditions, can King County test fog lines next winter on the short stretch between Valley Camp and the current end of pavement? In states where winters are much colder, what is used instead of fog lines?...35mph is too high. 25 mph would be much safer for pedestrians, bikers, and wildlife, as well as vehicles. As most people drive 5+ mph over the speed limit anyway, a lower speed limit will be important for law enforcement.

Response to MidFORC Comment #14

While the road is being designed for a 35-mph speed, King County, as the maintaining agency, will ultimately be the agency responsible in setting the speed limit on the route. On-going discussion between the partner agencies regarding the speed limit and traffic calming continue and include discussion regarding posting the route at a lower speed limit.

MidFORC Comment #15

We understand that the school bus has difficulty driving out of the couplet area on the lower road when it's icy so they may need some access to the upper road.

Response to MidFORC Comment #15

A winter shutdown period for construction would be implemented and would range from approximately November to February, depending on the weather. Upper road access during the winter shutdown period would be dependent on the condition of the road and, if conditions do not allow for safe public traffic, may be closed at the discretion of the maintaining agency King County.

MidFORC Comment #16

Once NEPA is completed, weed pre-treatment should start as soon as possible. If the project starts in 2013, then weed control must get underway summer 2012. Weed surveys and control work should continue throughout the 2-3 year project period. Even with the measures described on 4-43, construction will spread weeds that sprout from persistent seed banks or arrive with weekend visitors. Unless weed control is ongoing, these weeds will spread, especially before reseeded or replanted areas can fill in.

Response to MidFORC Comment #16

FHWA has begun working on an agreement with the USFS to proceed with pre-treatment of the project corridor. Revegetation efforts will be implemented as part of the construction project. Ongoing management of the area post-construction will be the responsibility of the maintaining agency (King County) and the land management agencies (DNR and USFS).

MidFORC Comment #17

What weed-free standard applies to this project? If this national standard http://www.nawma.org/WFF/Gravelpit%20inspect%20stdrs.pdf is the starting point, what additional "local" weeds will be added? The list should include knotweed, butterfly bush, holly, ivy, yellow archangel, reed canary grass, and others. For all certified material sources, will products and production areas be surveyed again to confirm they're still at the expected standard, and not just coasting on prior surveys.

Response to MidFORC Comment #17

FHWA will amend contract specifications for this project to specify that sources must be certified free of all Washington State Noxious Weed Control Board listed Class A, B and C weed lists. Sources may be inspected by the Government to ensure that sources are weed-free and will require approval before their use.

MidFORC Comment #18

...when soils are moved, how will you ensure that infested soils aren't moved to clean areas? And similarly, how will you ensure that clean soils aren't stored in an infested area. Both questions also apply to mulched materials, and other project materials. We suggest mitigating wetland loss with post-project weed surveys and weed control in adjacent wetlands. This would protect on-site wetlands from any lingering weeds, such as reed canary grass.

Response to MidFORC Comment #18

Weeds will undergo pre-treatment and any additional measures determined necessary will be incorporated into the project. Additional measures may include identification of areas and proper disposal of soils containing noxious weed seeds. Topsoil and woody debris/mulch may be stockpiled within the immediate area, such as at the toe of fill slopes at construction limits, which would further minimize potential spread of any weeds.

Final mitigation measures for impacts to wetlands will be determined through the 404 process in coordination with the US Army Corps of Engineers.

MidFORC Comment #19
As noted above, accommodation should be made for staff and volunteers traveling through the road corridor to reach weed control sites. This work needs to continue whenever possible.

Response to MidFORC Comment #19
FHWA will continue to work with the land management agencies (USFS, King County, and DNR) to coordinate administrative access during construction.

Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Comment #1
As the road design progresses, the project team should continue to work with land managers and the community on parking options.

Response to DNR Comment #1
FHWA will continue to work with the partner agencies, DNR, and stakeholders to ensure that continuing project development efforts attempt to meet parking needs.

DNR Comment #2
Also the parking should be paved and managed as a part of the road system.

Response to DNR Comment #2
FHWA will continue to work with King County on determining surface treatment for parking areas. King County and the appropriate land management agency (DNR and USFS) will determine management of parking areas and document this within the easement agreement for the road following completion of construction.

DNR Comment #3

Station	Area Name	Recreation Needs
187 - 190	Mailbox Peak Trailhead	**DNR Comment #3a** Alignment should allow as much room as possible on the south side of the road for parking, and the long-proposed valley entry-way. The new trailhead will be closed in the off-season, but increasingly this is a 3 and 4-season recreation site. Parking by the road should be maximized to handle recreation traffic for Mailbox, Granite Creek, and Grouse basin. Without such parking, drivers will park up and down the road, as they do now. School buses and public transit may use this trailhead, so at minimum will need room to drop-off passengers and turnaround. **Response to DNR Comment #3a** FHWA continues to work with DNR and the partner agencies regarding potential improvements to the existing south side parking area.
237	Mine Creek Kayak Access	**DNR Comment #3b** DNR is currently reviewing this and will provide further comment to FHWA. Retain existing parking along the north side of the road for kayak access.

		Response to DNR Comment #3b Current preliminary plans call for formal parking near the existing informal parking area and slightly expanded at the Mine Creek gate (former campground access road). FHWA will continue to coordinate with DNR on plans for this area.
247 - 255	Granite Creek Trailhead	**DNR Comment #3c** DNR is designing a trailhead for hiking access to the Granite Creek trail on the south side of the road. Do not preclude ingress/egress to the new trailhead. **Response to DNR Comment #3c** The proposed project is not expected to preclude future access.
433	Bessemer Gate	**DNR Comment #3d** Retain existing informal parking. Block ORV access through there. **Response to DNR Comment #3d** FHWA continues to work with the partner agencies regarding the design of proposed improvements at this site.
480	Russian Butte View	**DNR Comment #3e** Retain existing parking and expand to accommodate 6 cars. **Response to DNR Comment #3e** Current preliminary plans call for retaining the existing parking area, which will accommodate approximately 5 cars. An additional parking area is currently proposed just east of the existing parking area and could accommodate approximately 8 additional cars.