



File Code: 1950

Date: February 9, 2010

Dear Interested Party,

The Republic Ranger District of the Colville National Forest is soliciting comments on the Gibraltar Trail Construction Project. The proposed project is located approximately 3 miles southeast of Republic, Washington; south of State Highway 20 and Gibraltar Mountain. It would occur on National Forest System lands near Quartz, Camel Back, and Granite Mountains, and Ninemile Creek (see attached map).

The proposed action would construct on National Forest System land a trailhead facility and approximately 13.5 miles of new trail; 12.5 miles of which would be designated for non-motorized use. A portion of the currently closed Forest Road (FR) 2053200 that coincides with the trail would be converted to a motorized trail and the remainder decommissioned and removed from the Forest road system. In addition, the proposed action would change use designation on about 5 miles of the existing Forest roads as follows: Forest road 2053000, between County Road 99 and its intersection with County Road 233, would change from "Roads Open to Highway Legal Vehicles" to "Roads Open to All Vehicles;" and Forest Road 2054010 would be converted from "Roads Open to Highway Legal Vehicles" to "Trails Open to Vehicles 50 Inches or Less in Width." All road designation changes would be made to future Colville National Forest Motor Vehicle Use Maps (MVUM). For more details see the Proposed Action section below.

Project Location, Legal Description

The proposed Gibraltar trail and trailhead construction would occur in portions of Township 35 North, Range 33 East, Section 4, and Township 36 North, Range 33 East, Sections 17, 20, 21, 28, 29, 32, 33, and 34. Proposed road designation changes would occur in portions of Township 35 North, Range 33 East, Sections 2, 3, 10, 11, 12, and 13, and Township 35 North, Range 34 East, Sections 7, 8, and 18.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of this project is to provide motorized and non-motorized trail opportunities within close proximity to the community of Republic. The community has expressed a desire to have a trail system that could eventually be connected to the town's commercial district via existing municipal trails (Tiger Pathway) and private roads, and approached the Forest Service with a proposal on National Forest System lands that would assist that goal. The closest Forest Service managed walking or riding trails to the community of Republic are approximately ten miles south or west of town. The proposed Gibraltar trail system responds to the expressions of local residents and visitors desiring a backcountry trail experience close to Republic on National Forest System lands. Construction of this trail may also contribute to the economic stability of the Republic area.



Proposed Action

The following description of the proposed action is broken down by type of recreation use.

Gibraltar Trailhead: A trailhead would be constructed in the NE $\frac{1}{4}$ of the NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of the NW $\frac{1}{4}$ of T36 N, R33 E, Section 28 near the section line between Sections 21 and 28 (see attached map). The entrance to the trailhead would be east of Forest Road (FR) 2053000 and just north of FR 2053250. The trailhead access road and parking area would require minor shaping with heavy equipment to accommodate a minimum turn radius of 35 feet for vehicles with trailers. There would be some tree removal, installation of a culvert in the collection ditch along the east side of FR 2053000, and placement of gravel on the road and parking area surfaces. Trailhead amenities would include a single concrete toilet, information board, rock barriers, and entrance signs.

Non-motorized Trail: The Gibraltar Trail, consisting of approximately 11.7 miles of non-motorized trail, would be constructed with a 24 inch tread width and a clearing width of 8 feet. This trail design and maintenance would accommodate all non-motorized uses like, horse riding, pack stock hauling, hiking, mountain biking, Nordic skiing, and snowshoeing. The southern and western legs of the proposed trail would follow approximately two miles of closed but existing Forest Roads (numbered 2053370, 2053380, 2053520, 2053500, and 2100620). These roads would be given a dual management designation for both trail and road. The dual designation would not open these roads to motorized use, but would allow the Forest to reopen them should management priorities change in the future. Approximately one-eighth mile of the trail will follow FR 2100620 which is currently open to motor vehicles. There will be no change to the designated use of this road. The construction of the proposed trail segments on National Forest lands that terminate at or near State or private land boundaries (those trail segments located primarily in Section 17) do not intend to encourage or authorize access through those State and private lands.

An additional non-motorized spur trail (Quartz Mountain Trail) would be constructed from the Gibraltar Trail in T36 N, R33 E, Section 33 and climb approximately 0.8 miles until it intersects with FR 2100500 approximately 0.4 miles below Quartz Mountain lookout. It would be constructed using the same design and management criteria as the non-motorized Gibraltar Trail above.

Shared (Multiple-use, Motorized and Non-motorized) Trail: Approximately 1 mile of multiple use (motorized and non-motorized uses) trail would be created in T36N, R33E, Section 16 (see map). Of this, about $\frac{3}{4}$ mile of the trail would require new construction, while $\frac{1}{4}$ mile co-occurs with the existing, but closed FR 2053200. The constructed trail would have a 50 inch tread width and a clearing width of 8 feet. The portion of trail on FR 2053200 would also be to this standard, but may include narrowing the existing road bed to enhance the trail experience, for example, by pulling in the fill slope. The design and maintenance for the entire mile of multiple-use trail would be for OHV (Off Highway Vehicle) use 50 inches in width or less (like quads, ATVs, and four wheelers) but include single track motorized (motorcycles) and non-motorized uses.

The Forest Road System designation on the segment of FR 2053200 that the trail would use would be converted from a road to a trail (for management and maintenance tracking purposes).

The remainder of FR 2053200 would be decommissioned and removed from the Forest Road System due to its location in a wet riparian area. An effective barrier to motorized use would be required where FR 2053200 road veers east and the trail continues south to FR 2053000 to prevent unauthorized use on the decommissioned roadbed. If motorized trail access through the section of State land (Section 16) is not granted prior to the on-set of trail construction, signs and barriers would be posted ¼ mile from the Forest boundary (where the motorized trail leaves the Gibraltar Trail non-motorized portion, and continues north) indicating motorized use is prohibited beyond that point.

Road Designation and Motor Vehicle Use Map Changes: Road designations in the Forest Road System and on the Colville National Forest Motor Vehicle Use Maps would be changed on about 5 miles of open Forest roads (see map). Designation of FR 2054010 would change from “Roads Open to Highway Legal Vehicles” to “Trails Open to Vehicles 50 Inches or Less in Width.” The result would be that FR 2054010 would be closed to full-size vehicle traffic but open to OHVs and motorcycles. Additionally, FR 2053000 between County Road 99 (C99, Hall Creek Road) and County Road 233 (C233) would change from “Roads Open to Highway Legal Vehicles” to “Roads Open to All Vehicles” allowing OHV traffic. These changes would enhance connectivity of existing roads open to OHV recreation uses in the area.

Public Involvement

Project information and maps are available from Eric McQuay, Recreation Program Manager for the Republic and Three Rivers Ranger Districts, 650 E. Delaware, Republic, WA, 99166, (509) 775-7400, or from project leader Jean Lavell at the Three Rivers Ranger District Office, 255 West 11th, Kettle Falls, WA, 99141, (509) 684-7700, or via email at comments-pacificnorthwest-colville-republic@fs.fed.us.

In accordance with federal regulation 36 CFR 215, the comment period for the Gibraltar Trail Construction Project is open on the date of publication of the Request for Comments in the legal section of the *Republic News Miner*, the newspaper of record for the Republic Ranger District. The purpose of this comment period is to provide an opportunity for the public to provide early and meaningful participation on a proposed action prior to a decision being made by the Responsible Official, Linda Ellett-Fee, Republic District Ranger. Those who provide specific written comments during this comment period are eligible to appeal the decision under the regulations (36CFR 215).

Decision to be Made

It is expected that the environmental analysis will be documented with a CE (Categorical Exclusion). This trail construction project falls into a category of proposed actions that is included in the 2005 court order (*Earth Island Institute v. Ruthenbeck*) which requires public notice and opportunity to comment, and is subject to appeal. The applicable category of actions is identified in agency procedures as trail construction and reconstruction (FSH 1909.15 Sec. 31.2(1)).

The purpose of a CE is to disclose any meaningful environmental effects, and to determine whether effects might be significant. Through this process the decision maker will issue a

Decision Memo which will document the decision whether or not to implement the project, and any measures identified to mitigate potential adverse effects.

How to Comment and Timeframe

Written, facsimile, hand-delivered, and electronic comments concerning this project will be accepted for 30 calendar days following the publication of the Request for Comments legal notice in the newspaper of record, the *Republic News Miner*. The publication date in the newspaper of record is the exclusive means for calculating the comment period for this project. Those wishing to comment should not rely upon dates or timeframe information provided by any other source. Regulations prohibit extending the length of the comment period (36 CFR 215.6).

Please submit specific written comments related to the proposed Gibraltar Trail Construction Project to Linda Ellett-Fee, District Ranger, Republic Ranger District, 650 E. Delaware Ave., Republic, WA, 99166, or faxed to (509) 775-7401. The office business hours for those submitting hand-delivered comments are: 7:30 am to 4:00 pm Monday through Friday, excluding holidays. If you desire to visit with Eric or Linda, please call the Republic Ranger District Office at (509) 775-7400.

Electronic comments should be submitted to comments-pacificnorthwest-colville-republic@fs.fed.us.

It is the responsibility of persons providing comments to submit them by the close of the comment period. Please provide with your comments the following information:

1. Name and Address;
2. Title of the proposed action;
3. Specific comments on the proposed action, along with supporting reasons that the Responsible Official should consider in reaching a decision.
4. Signature or other verification of identity upon request; identification of the individual or organization who authored the comment(s) is necessary for appeal eligibility.

Thank you for your participation in this project.

Sincerely,

/s/ Linda M. Ellett-Fee
LINDA M. ELLETT FEE
Deputy Forest Supervisor

February 9, 2010

cc: Eric McQuay
Jean A Lavell