



# Friends of the White Salmon River

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Klickitat County Planning Department  
228 W Main Street,  
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Via email to: [planning@klickitatcounty.org](mailto:planning@klickitatcounty.org)  
RE: Re-issuance of SEP2020-21

Dear Planning Department:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this matter.

Friends of the White Salmon River (FWSR) is a non-profit organization dedicated to protecting the White Salmon River and its watershed for fish, wildlife, and for the residents of the area. FWSR's supporters include citizens of Klickitat and Skamania Counties and others who live, work and recreate in the White Salmon River watershed. Our members and supporters would be negatively affected by land use actions that have an adverse effect of the river, its tributaries, and wildlife habitat.

## 1. General Comments

FWSR believes that the Under Canvas permits should be denied, or at a minimum a full ESA is required for the project.

This is not a proposal for a campground. It can variously be described as a resort, a hotel, or a high disturbance commercial recreational development. It does not qualify for the recreational park permit. It also does not meet the criteria for a Conditional Use Permit. There are obvious and serious conflicts with neighboring uses and the project is inconsistent with the purpose of the Resource Land zone, notwithstanding that some of the property will be managed as timber land. Numerous comments submitted in September 2020 regarding the Draft SEPA made these points.

Demonstrable, clear likely adverse impacts exist. These need to be identified, described, evaluated, and addressed. The mitigations in the Reissued MDNS are do none of these things.

It appears that most comments identifying adverse impacts have not been understood or addressed. Two items stand out in this regard. For example, many comments addressed the adverse impacts of increased traffic, including not only on Oak Ridge Road but in Husum. Additionally, many well-substantiated comments

identify what will inexorably be adverse impacts on western gray squirrel. Neither of these clear and real adverse impacts (or others also identified) are acknowledged, evaluated, or addressed.

Two commenters on the Draft SEPA pointed out that the sheer number of mitigations indicates that there are probable adverse impacts. The number of mitigations has increased in the Re-issued SEPA, which only strengthens the point and in fact indicates that the County recognizes potential adverse impacts. An ESA is the tool for addressing these.

Many of the proposed mitigations are requirements for future plans, designs and permits from other agencies. There is no provision for evaluation of this welter of plans and permits and how they address adverse impacts. It seems extremely odd for a document "mitigating" impacts of proposed actions is written before actions have been described.

Additionally, and crucially, there is no provision for oversight of compliance. A few mitigations say a plan must be submitted before a building permit is issued, but this puts the burden of compliance on the County building department, where it does not belong and where it is not effectively exercised.

One reason an ESA is needed is to consider and establish current conditions. Comments submitted by Bricklin & Newman LLP highlight describe how the Weyerhaeuser clear-cut negatively impacted squirrel habitat. No SEPA was required for that clear-cut on the assertion by Weyerhaeuser that the land would be maintained in timber production, allowing the oak habitat to regrow and the squirrels to continue to use the habitat.

Additionally, those of us who involved in permits for on-going subdivision along Lyons Road can testify that squirrel habitat in this same area was significantly damaged by that development.

This Under Canvas proposal which will clearly and indisputably further damage not only the squirrel habitat, but the life cycle and continued activity of squirrels. An ESA would establish current conditions, as they now exist, having been impacted by events in the recent past. No evaluation of impacts can be done without an accurate, scientifically defensible and current inventory of conditions.

In summary, the Re-issued SEPA fails to do the necessary job of identifying and evaluating probable adverse impacts. The overall effect of the Re-issued SEPA is to allow significant harm and allow Under Canvas to avoid liability. This is both sad and unfortunate.

Comments on specific mitigation items.

**Mitigation 1**, like others, assumes that the issuance of specific permits will mitigate adverse impacts. This is clearly not true. Forest Practice permits and others assume and allow specific levels of environmental damage. Without identifying adverse impacts and putting specific limitation on additional permits, this does not forestall or mitigate adverse impacts.

**Mitigations 2 and 32.** Critical Areas Ordinance and Assessment Report. I am going to sound like broken record as I go through these, but adverse impacts must be identified, not treated as a theoretical possibility. Compliance is required, but this is a complaint-driven county with no enforcement arm. The concerned public will have no way of knowing if there is compliance or not, so will be unable to file complaints.

**Mitigations 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 26.** Storm water. Most of these mitigations require obtaining permits from other agencies, with all the attendant problems already identified. Storm water is of particular concern here, with the possibility of discharge to the White Salmon. Merely requiring permits is not sufficient. Mitigation

26 is simply baffling. “The Applicant shall maintain any offsite drainage that flows through the project site”. What drainage? From what sources?

Possibly **Mitigation 26** is related to **Mitigation 21**, requiring consultation to determine if “existing culverts are sized correctly for the stream”. What stream? Perennial? Please refer to comments submitted by Thomas and Marlene Woodward on January 21, 2021 regarding a perennial stream that flows from their property.

**Mitigations 9 and 10. Domestic Water.** The domestic water issues make the Re-issued SEPA invalid. The DOE comment cited is not a mitigation, it is the start of an environmental assessment. The project is limited to 5000 gallons per day. With this limitation, the project will certainly not be 95 tents. If Under Canvas finds a way to increase the water available (storage has been mentioned, or a water right for additional withdrawal), the impacts of the additional water use must be evaluated. Comments submitted on the Draft SEPA indicate that there may be serious groundwater impacts from a 5000-gallon withdrawal. Additional withdrawal will have more impact. It is simply impossible to evaluate impacts without a clear description of the proposed action.

Please review the comments on potential impacts to hydrologic resources in the Yakama Nation comment on September 18, 2020. The issues raised in this comment are not addressed in the mitigations.

Parenthetically, meters should be obligatory on any water source used by this project. For many reasons mentioned in earlier comments (laundry, cooking, numbers of people served, etc.) there will be a clear temptation for Under Canvas to exceed the 5000 gallons per day limit.

Mitigation 10 is particularly unclear on the issue of a public water system. It requires a “public water source” and moves on to discuss public water systems, but it does not actually require a public water system. Assuming this is just a grammatical error, and a public water system is required, it is still very unclear. “The total number of connections .... will be determined through the constructed facilities and water rights”. Again, we are left without a clear project description, and therefore it is impossible to evaluate impacts. Email correspondence included in the comments posted on the County website includes this email from the Washington State Department of Health TNC Cervantes, Andres (DOH).

“<Andres.Cervantes@doh.wa.gov> Mon, Oct 12, 2020 at 5:22 PM  
To: "Kavanagh, David (DOHi)" <davidk@klickitatcounty.org>  
Not a problem David.

I don't think I have seen this submittal, and this makes it a Group A system. TNC if the majority of the population is transient or a Group A-NTNC if they have more than 25 employees.

Either way, they can only add the total number of connections the water system can support through the constructed facilities and water rights. The second phase or expansion would be based on securing water rights and or constructing facilities.

Trucked water is not considered a reliable source of supply that can replace or take the place of a permanent source.”

Unfortunately, not only does this leave us with an unclear project description, it also leaves us, as incorporated into the mitigation, with uncertainty about whether trucked water will be permitted on an interim basis. I do not think that is the intention, but the question remains without a strict prohibition of using trucked water at any time for the project.

**Mitigation 11.** Multiple commenters on the Draft SEPA pointed out the impossibility of evaluating the impacts of a septic system not yet designed. We raised the particular concern of multiple small systems

being permitted, leading to inadequate operational oversight. The mitigation, like others, requires plans and permits, but does not address the concerns of impacts on groundwater or runoff. The impacts of a septic system not yet designed cannot be evaluated.

**Mitigation 13 and 15.** Noise and events. Mitigation 13 addresses noise during construction, but not during operation. I live next to a site that was a wedding and event site for many years. I can testify from personal experience (and I did testify at a County hearing) that noise is a problem for neighbors. Consideration of another event site permit in Trout Lake generated a torrent of comments from neighbors about noise from onsite events. It is unclear to me whether events will be permitted on site. Mitigation 15, prohibiting event parking on Oak Ridge, implies there will be events, as does the inclusion of an event stage in the project description. I am wondering operating as an event site requires yet another permit? At least, the noise mitigations should include time or volume restrictions for on-site events.

**Mitigations 14, 15, 15, 17, 18, 22, 23, 24, and 25** address traffic impacts and access. Mitigation 17 addresses fire access road standards, and I will discuss this in the western gray squirrel section. As for the other mitigations, the impacts of additional traffic are not correctly identified or addressed. Numerous commenters have addressed this, and I expect will again, so I will not make detailed comments. There are two inter-related issues I want to address – the traffic studies are incorrect and they ignore facts about peak times and hazards which are obvious to everyone who travels the 141 corridor. Residents' traffic concerns should lead to an assessment of the actual potential adverse impacts.

P and R Roos say "It is often a nightmare here during the summer/busy season with throngs of visiting cars, campers, motorcycles, and this year more than one car club travelling at all speeds – both well over and under the speed limit [ through our two-land town via the 141. Add in hundreds more rafting business folks, giddy at the new adventure who wander often absent-mindedly back and forth across lanes of traffic. As well as logging trucks who travel at speeds often over the limit and it's a dangerous situation."

Jan Muir says "The intersection [of Oak Ridge Road] on SR 141 is already extremely dangerous with all the local traffic, rafters crossing, log trucks moving, etc."

Dave Waddell points out traffic problems at intersections such as Hwy 141 and 14, where existing problems will be exacerbated by increased Under Canvas traffic.

The traffic studies presented by the applicant are not sufficient. The studies affirm that the traffic impacts are insignificant because the road "capacity" is adequate. This seems like an irrelevant response to real concerns. Additionally, the data about peak use are just plain wrong. A count on October 9, 2020 between 4:00 and 6:00 PM widely misses what is the actual peak, probably more like 10:00 AM – 4:00 PM on a Saturday in August. The time selected misses not only normal traffic, but also logging trucks, pedestrians, and rafting company vehicles. A count in May is likewise off-season and again at the wrong time of day. Besides which, in 2020 all traffic was drastically reduced by the effects of the pandemic, especially visitor and recreational traffic.

**Mitigations 17, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31** address fire danger and emergency events. I will address mitigation 17 in more detail in my comments on western gray squirrel. Everyone seems to agree that there is fire danger, increased by the presence of this large development. I want to emphasize a couple of things. When a fire emergency arises, the situation often becomes chaotic. A fire breaking out at night when people are on site and sleeping is quite different from a fire breaking out during the day when people may be mostly off site. Planning is extremely complicated for such contingencies. I do not think that the local fire district and the

DNR should be asked to dedicate resources to planning for this really unnecessary project, when they will have plenty to do protecting residents and resources.

In addition, the pond may not be planned on as a source of water for fire suppression. This is clearly explained in the comments filed by Bricklin & Newman on the Draft SEPA. That leave the project, with the exempt well restrictions, without a source of water for fire suppression.

Many local orchards, timber companies, and ranches have water trucks and sprayers on site that are used in the normal course of their business, so they can respond rapidly and effectively to fire activity before the professionals get there. Under Canvas will have no such equipment or capacity. Rural Fire District 3 specifically comments, in fact that they do not recommend fire suppression equipment beyond required fire extinguishers. They will be entirely dependent on a volunteer fire department as first responders. This is just wrong, and it is dangerous.

Likewise, the difficulties of emergency egress are obvious, with no acceptable solution available, since the limitation is Oak Ridge Road.

**Mitigations 33 and 34** address western gray squirrel (WGS) issues. Despite well-informed, documented, and unarguable legal and scientific comments filed by wildlife biologist David Anderson, by Crag Law and by Bricklin & Newman, these mitigation measures are completely inadequate. The County is abdicating their legal responsibility to protect public resources.

1. WGS is a state threatened species. Existing habitat and future habitat for recovery must be protected. Any habitat in the White Salmon watershed should be considered critical because of its important in the known range of habitat for WGS
2. Habitat and squirrel surveys cited fail to provide sufficient information about current conditions.
3. Undeniable adverse effects are not identified or considered.
4. The County does not consider the impact of human activity, including activity of pets brought on site.
5. There are squirrel nests immediately in the vicinity of the tents and parking spaces. The work required in Mitigation 17 to widen roads on site will do direct and permanent harm to the species.
6. The forest management plan does not provide specific long-term habitat mitigation plan
7. The WDFW comment provides completely inadequate protection measures. Language like “when possible” simply permits damage.
8. The proposed mitigations are not sufficient under the requirements of the County’s Critical Areas Ordinance, which requires a habitat management plan.
9. Because of damage done by the Weyerhaeuser clear-cut and by on-going damage over the years by residential development nearby, preservation of undisturbed habitat is critical. Continued permitting on a case-by-case basis allows cumulative damage in a way that will sooner or later lead to the extermination of the squirrel.

**Mitigations 36 and 37.** Vegetation and weeds on site. The Yakama Nation comment on the Draft SEPA points out several problems in the Forest Management Plan provisions on vegetation management. Mitigation 36 should require the applicant to work with native planting and revegetation specialists to ensure that native plants (including oak) are not harmed and that all replanting is with native plants.

**Mitigations 38 and 39** address dust during construction and air quality. As normal in the Re-issued SEPA, there is no definition of the nature and extent of the impact. Additional traffic on the unpaved portion of Oak Ridge Road will generate quantities of dust. A plume of dust is an iconic site throughout rural eastern Washington. If you’ve stood in the path of such plume, you know this is a problem. This is potentially true during construction, but it is also an on-going problem with each additional vehicle that uses the road.

**Mitigation 41** requires external lighting to be directed away from adjacent properties and be shielded or downcast. Doesn't Klickitat County have a lighting ordinance, to protect dark skies? If so, why not cite this ordinance here, to establish specific standards and facilitate compliance enforcement?

**Additional comments**

**Stream typing.** The comments from the Yakama Nation on the Draft SEPA mention changing a designation of a stream type. A stream type designation must be based on observation according to standard protocols. I do not know if this problem still exists in the updated documents, but in case it does, I want to support the Yakama comment. Stream designations have important consequences for the level of protection they are afforded. Any stream in the vicinity of the White Salmon River must be evaluated carefully because of potential impacts on habitat in the River for threatened and endangered species.

**Trails.** Here too the Yakama Nation comments on the Draft SEPA provide important input on the potential for trails mentioned in the Forest Management Plan but not included in the SEPA discussions. These concerns merited discussion in the Re-issued SEPA, for all the reasons given in the Yakama comment, in particular potential effects on wildlife and on erosive events. Both of these concerns deserve to be evaluated for potential adverse impacts. The possibility of wildlife harassment in particular is serious. I do not see a mitigation addressing these concerns.

Thank you again for the opportunity to comment. Frankly, it is very disheartening to go through the process over and over. If we must, we must, I suppose. Perhaps one day the County will understand the importance of preserving and protecting our shared resources.

Very truly yours,



Patricia L. Arnold