



United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Mount Rainier National Park
55210 238th Avenue E.
Ashford, Washington 98304-9751

IN REPLY REFER TO:

10.D.

May 22, 2017

Mr. Arthur Pope
Executive Director
Wilderness Report
33190 Bloomberg Road
Eugene, OR 97405

Dear Mr. Pope:

Thank you for your letter dated April 25, 2017. In the letter you posed two questions for response, one regarding the use of chainsaws in the Park's wilderness and a second questioning the number of cuts made to some trees that had been cleared from the Wonderland Trail.

Chainsaws are indeed used by the Park's trail crews to clear downed trees and open approximately 280 miles of trail each summer, at least half of which are located in lower elevation old growth forests with very large trees. Chainsaw use is considered the minimum tool required to complete trail clearing in the Park given the magnitude and complexity of the work involved, and the relatively short, snow-free season in which to accomplish it. Hand powered saws are used by employees to remove isolated trees after a trail has been opened.

The Park's trail crews typically seek to minimize the number of cuts made to clear a trail of downed trees. Here's the relevant guidance provided in the Mount Rainier National Park Trails Handbook, which describes trail maintenance standards:

Removal of Downed Timber

Downed trees should be removed entirely from the trail corridor in order to maintain a safe, clear route of travel. When cutting a log, the cuts should be made at an angle sufficient to permit the cut section to be rolled free. Large log sections may have to be removed with mechanical means such as come-a-long or peavey for safety and efficiency. Keep saw cuts to a minimum in order to reduce noise and visual intrusion.

Cutting windfall timber is an extremely hazardous task and care must be taken to insure that the cutter, other employees and Park visitors are safe. Examine the log carefully to understand how the sections of the log will react when they are cut.

Cut log ends should be hidden from view as often as possible, even if the log has to be cut well outside of the trail corridor. However, use time wisely and do not expend unreasonable efforts to hide cut ends.

Log sections cleared from the trail should be removed to the downhill side of the trail and secured. Use extreme caution when rolling logs off the trail on steep hillsides and switchbacks. Be sure visitors and employees are clear of the path of a moving log.

I agree that less evidence of cuts along trails is better, and this remains the Park's target standard for aesthetic, safety and efficiency purposes. In this case, your photos indicate that providing expedient trail access was prioritized over aesthetics during our recent clearing work. I appreciate you bringing it to our attention, as this example doesn't meet the standard that we typically seek.

I am pleased to learn that you enjoyed your Wonderland Trail hike, and thank you for sharing your observations and concerns with me. I have, in turn, shared them with the supervisor of the Park's trail crews. Our crews work hard to get the job done each year, and appreciate hearing from the public regarding their varied trail experiences, whether positive or negative.

Sincerely,



Tracy Swartout
Deputy Superintendent