



Kanchenjunga, 28,169 feet; world's third tallest peak

September 4, 2015

John Allen
Forest Supervisor
Deschutes National Forest
63095 Deschutes Market Road
Bend, OR 97701

Dear Mr. Allen:

While on a hike in the three Sisters Wilderness a couple of weeks ago I hiked from the trailhead at the end of road 1026 to Scott Lake, on to Lava Camp Lake via the PCT, then along the Millican Crater Trail #94 from Lava Camp Lake to its junction with trail #94A and on out trail #95 back to the trailhead at the end of road 1026.

During this hike I was stunned to discover that some years ago a long section of the Millican Crater Trail had been thinned and brushed into a hundred foot wide fireline. Since that time this section of the Millican Trail has been washing away and turned into an eroded gully. I am angered that fire restoration funds were not used to stabilize the impact of this wilderness intrusion before such damage occurred and further that no restoration efforts have occurred in the years since the fire. Though this is a time of tight budgets this type of resource damage is avoidable and should be an embarrassment to any professional land manager. After all, as I recall, part of the Forest Service motto includes "caring for the land".

At no time during our entire hike I did not observe any current maintenance of trail drainage structures. Indeed, significant past investments in high-end tread restoration work involving the installation of check dams and water bars are in danger of being totally lost without *immediate* maintenance efforts.

Throughout this circuit nearly every piece of trail with any discernable grade showed damage related to poor drainage maintenance; many sections gullied, others deeply incised, others rock filled and more streambed than trail. The amount of soil being moved down these trails is truly incredible as evidenced by clogged waterbars and the debris causeways growing at the base of many grades. Even Oregon's iconic PCT, though in better condition, was suffering damage and had, in my estimation, somewhat less than 20% of originally constructed drainage structures in working condition.

Neglecting necessary annual drainage structure maintenance creates resource damage that grows geometrically. The year one structure fails runoff to the next working structure can double in

volume and velocity moving many times the sediment load allowed by an intact system. As this volume grows the next structure fails, flows continue to increase, another structure clogs, fails and, like dominoes, erosion rips a gully down long grades damaging miles of trail.

It is my impression that Forest recreation dollars are focused more on addressing concerns related to public comfort rather than resource protection. Trails are being logged out; work that is certainly appreciated, but logs can be removed at any future time funds again become available. Drainage maintenance cannot wait. A trail, gullied, ditched, and boulder-filled is permanently damaged; repair is extremely expensive if not impossible.

It is easy to criticize. But, allow me to offer a few suggestions. I suggest that wilderness staff:

Make trail erosion control a priority. Teach trail crews and all wilderness staff about the importance of drainage and instruct them concerning the easy steps they can take to help protect the resource.

Require drainage maintenance as part of any trail contract or FS trail crew assignment. If this is unaffordable consider the wisdom of exposing a trail to the increased use associated with log removal or brush control. Consider, how the resource would best be protected?

Put tools back in the hands of Wilderness Rangers. Sure, being a Wilderness ranger on patrol is a great job but typically the patrol offers little direct benefit to the resource. A Wilderness Ranger charged with doing light drainage maintenance on a section of popular trail can engage just as many hikers and do so in a way that demonstrates the Forest Service motto of “Caring for the land and serving people”.

Expand partnerships that create the land stewards of tomorrow. Seek to accomplish recreation management objectives in ways that involve youth. Conservation Corps offer a great value and Oregon is home to several including Northwest Youth Corps.

Many of Oregon trails were constructed decades ago. They were well designed, well located, and were built to high standards. These trails are legacy resources and deserve to be cared for and passed on to future generation in their original condition—not as cobble-filled riverbeds or abandoned because of short-term management restrictions or vision.

Thank you for considering my comments. *I look forward to hearing how and when damage to the Millican Trail by fire crews will be mitigated.*

Sincerely

Arthur Pope