

Trip Report

Title: Mt. Rainier National Park, Wonderland Trail

Submitted by: Art Pope

Date: 8/2016

Name of wilderness or Wild River: Mt. Rainier National Park

Management Unit: Mt. Rainier National Park

Administrative Location: East Ashford, WA

Head of Administrative Unit: Randy King, Park Superintendent

Report Category: check all that apply

| | |
|-------------------------|---|
| Trail and access issues | X |
| Management policy | X |
| Management actions | |
| User regulations | |
| Mechanization | X |
| Development | |
| Wildlife | |
| Wilderness Values | X |
| Fire | |

Summary: 250 word max

At Mount Rainier years of management decisions have degraded the park's wilderness resource: splashes of orange and yellow paint mark the trail through high meadows, stark steel signs on square metal posts delineate trail junctions, filter cloth peeks out from beneath imported gravel, metal, plastic and fiberglass culverts channel small rivulets and rotary-peeled, creosote-treated water-bars dot the trail.

Route Summary: where did you go?

Hiked the 93 mile Wonderland Trail around Mt. Rainier.

Trip Report: comments must support letter grades

D Wilderness values: management's sensitivity to wilderness values. From field observations, detailed below, there appears to be little emphasis by park management to complete backcountry projects in a manner consistent with maximizing wilderness values.

D Wilderness skills: success in addressing maintenance issues with primitive skills. Use of primitive skills appears to be a very low priority in management of the Mt. Rainier Backcountry. A very modest backcountry bridge was observed being constructed using chainsaws. Material for numerous past trail maintenance projects was imported by helicopter.

Observed extensive trail brushing through old-growth stands where the only trailside brush to be eradicated was Vanilla Leaf—a perennial rarely growing over twelve inches. This crew could

be more effective, and the visitor experience would be enhanced, if they were provided better training, leadership and direction.

- F** **Mechanization: current or recent use of power equipment**
Observed consistent and frequent use of chainsaws for blow down removal and extensive use of helicopters to haul in material for trail maintenance including crushed rock for fill and decking for renovation of backcountry shelters.
- C** **Regulations: permit systems, visitor contacts, enforcement actions**
Permit system requires hikers of the Wonderland trail to stay in established campsites that are often unappealing, poorly located and have little separation between sites. In order to “land” a permit users are likely to have to accept significant modifications from their preferred schedule including extremely long or extremely short distances between campsites.
- C** **Permanent structures: inappropriate structures within the wilderness**
Numerous historic cabins are located near the Wonderland Trail. These structures are used as a base of operations by Park staff. On the East side of the mountain such cabins are not available and Backcountry Rangers camp out. We had our most extensive and positive encounters with Backcountry staff in this area.

Required campsites on the Wonderland trail each have heavily trafficked “bear hang” areas with unsightly steel poles. Requiring the use of bear canisters would reduce traffic and related resource impacts, reduce user encounters and allow removal of these inappropriate structures.
- C** **Other:**
Hiking the trail in early August we encountered three AmeriCorps funded trail crews. All of these crews were working within easy walking distance of main trailheads. No recent work was observed at any of the remote high elevation areas where erosion was causing severe resource damage.