



Gifford Pinchot National Forest | 2023

Special Recreation Permit Plan, Mount Margaret Backcountry

Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument

May 2022 (updated Jan 2023)

Background

The Federal Lands Recreation Enhancement Act (REA) authorizes a Special Recreation Permit (SRP) fee for permits issued for specialized recreation uses of Federal recreational lands and waters, such as group activities, recreation events, and motorized recreational vehicle use. SRP's are issued to allocate capacity or disperse use, protect natural and cultural resources, provide for health and safety of visitors, and help cover the higher costs for providing these specialized services.

In August of 1982 Congress passed Public Law 97-243 which created the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument (Monument) and directed the Forest Service to manage the Monument to protect the geologic, ecologic, cultural resources, and in accordance with the provisions of the Act allow geologic forces and ecological succession to continue substantially unimpeded. The Act also provided for the Forest Service to protect the significant features of the Monument; reduce user conflicts; and ensure visitor safety; to control times and means of access and use of the Monument.

The Mount Margaret Backcountry SRP location is within Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest (see maps). This backcountry area is managed according to the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument's Comprehensive Management Plan (1983) and the Mount Margaret Backcountry Plan (1985).

[Public Law 97-243](#)

This document describes the rationale for the Special Recreation Permit (SRP) fees, the locations where an SRP is required, the specialized services, the enhanced management activities offered at each site, and how the SRP revenue is used.

Rationale

In 2008, the Mount St. Helens Citizen Advisory Committee (MSHCAC) was formed. The MSHCAC was tasked by the state of Washington's congressional delegation to provide a local vision for the future of MSHNVM. Specifically, they were asked to present "an informed recommendation regarding the best course of action for ensuring that Mount St. Helens remains a key tourist destination and economic engine for the area while preserving its natural resources and allowing it to remain a world leader for scientific research."

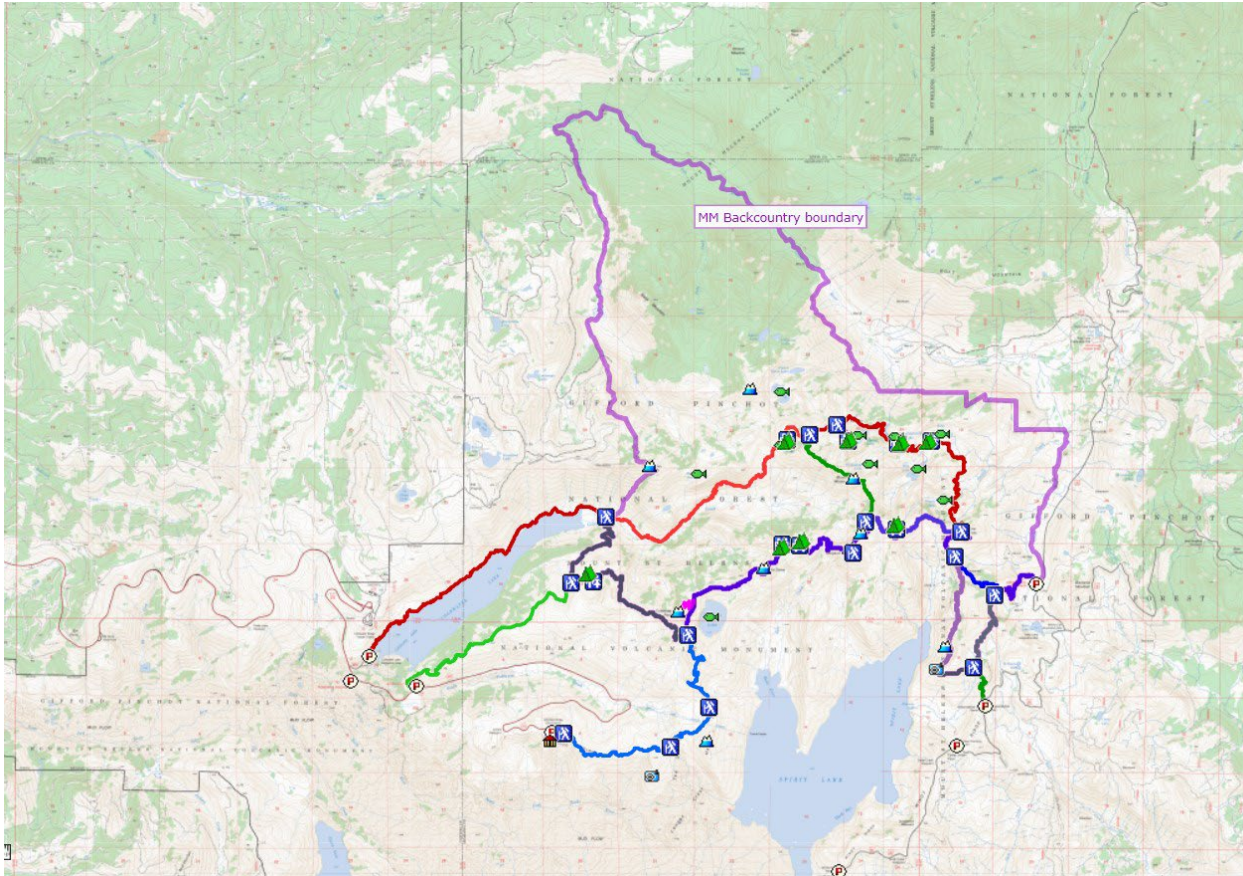
Providing access to the Monument's stunning landscapes on safe, well-maintained trails was identified by the Committee as the top infrastructure investment priority for MSHNVM. "A well-maintained trail system is the most cost-effective investment for increasing public access and promoting visitation to the Monument." The Monument's trail network is critical to providing hikers, recreationists, educators, and scientists access to Mount St. Helens' unique landscape features, while limiting the impacts of off-trail activities. There are approximately 43 miles of trail within the Mount Margaret Backcountry.

To protect the fragile resources of the area, overnight visitation to the Mount Margaret Backcountry area is limited to 44 individuals per night during the snow free period ([permits](#) are available on Recreation.Gov and are required May 1 through November 30). They are required to camp at one of 8 designated campsites. These campsites provide a tent pad and a composting toilet.

This use requires specialized management to address health and safety issues associated with the recreational use and address damage caused by recreational activities to an environment sensitive to changes caused by recreational use.

Location

The Mount Margaret Backcountry is in the northern section of the Monument. Part of it was in the blast zone of the 1980 eruption. It also contains one of the most visually stunning and rugged areas of the Monument, Mt Whittier.



Services and Management

Trails:

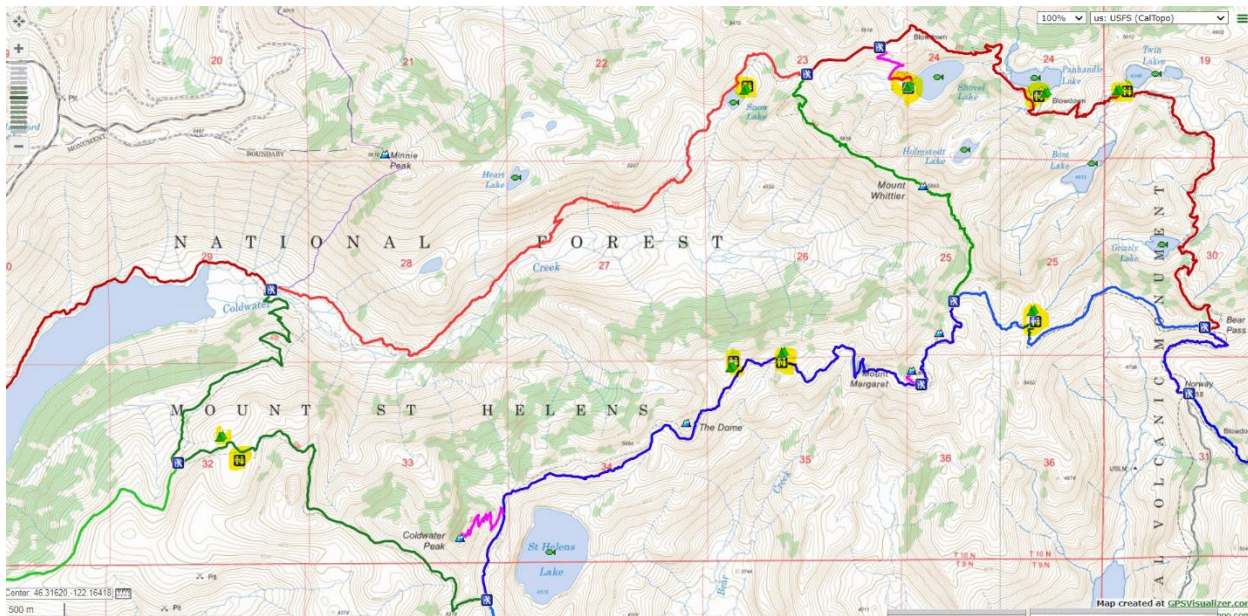
There are approximately 43 miles of trail in the Mount Margaret Backcountry. While the forest relies heavily on partnerships to help maintain our trails, a base of U.S. Forest Service funded trails employees to coordinate volunteer project work and to perform annual trail maintenance is necessary.

Wildlife Management:

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife offers special hunts in the Mount Margaret Backcountry Area for Elk and Mountain Goat. Extra coordination is required to provide specific information to permitted hunters entering the area. This coordination includes the development of hunt specific information and permit processing. Additional backcountry patrols are scheduled during this time to ensure public safety.

Sanitation:

For the protection of sensitive resources within the blast zone of Mount St. Helens, the Forest Service has provided backcountry composting toilets. Toilets that are beyond their functional life cycle will need to be periodically replaced.



Use of Special Recreation Permit Fee Revenue

As stated previously, overnight visitation is limited to 44 individuals per night during the permit season, and visitors are required to camp at one of 8 designated campsites. Permits are available on [Recreation.Gov](https://www.recreation.gov). Visitors must print out their permit and have it with them during their trip. The permit season is May 1 through November 30 (214 nights); however, given on the ground conditions (snow), generally visitors can backcountry camp in the area from June 1 through October 31 (150 nights).

The proposal is \$7 per person/per night (applicable to anyone 16 years of age and older). On average visitors spend two nights in the area. Given this, potential revenue is estimated at \$45,000 (see table 2).

Recreation fees are used for the following (see table 1):

- ❖ Forest Service staffing (two seasonal employees) to conduct educational outreach, make contacts with day and overnight visitors, perform annual trail maintenance, and annual toilet maintenance.
- ❖ Managing composting toilets
- ❖ Managing ground trash – Completed by FS staff while on field tour.
- ❖ Trail sign maintenance and replacement
- ❖ Coordination with Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife for special hunt management.

Table 1. Use of Special Recreation Permit Fees

Item	Cost	Description
Two GS-5 Rec Techs - 90 days each	\$34,200	Duties include: Conduct educational outreach and patrol, check for permit/fee compliance, make educational contacts with day and overnight visitors, perform trail and facility maintenance.
Summer Fleet	\$5,000	
Composting Toilets	\$10,000	Maintenance and periodic replacement
Materials and Supplies, including trail maintenance	\$5,000	Includes signage along routes, information kiosks with maps, brochures, volunteer related expenses
TOTAL	\$54,200	



Table 2. Data (number of people and total nights) from Recreation.Gov

	Total People	Total Nights	Estimated Revenue at \$7/person/night (2 nights)
2019	1940	1435	\$27,160
2020	2574	1523	\$36,036
2021	3279	1818	\$45,906

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