

April 2013

## **Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail Snoqualmie Pass Optimal Location Review**

USDA Forest Service

Snoqualmie Ranger District – Mt Baker Snoqualmie National Forest

The National Trails System Act of 1968 states that the US Forest Service, the lead managing agency for the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail (PCT), may recommend to relocate segments of the PCT right-of-way upon concurrence with the head of the Federal Agency having jurisdiction over the lands involved and determination that: (1) such a relocation is necessary to preserve the purposes for which the trail was established, or (2) the relocation is necessary to promote a sound land management program in accordance with established multiple-use principles. The trail relocation review developed for the PCT, is referred to as the **Optimal Location Review (OLR)**. This OLR is conducted in accordance with the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Agreement between the US Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service, California State Parks and the Pacific Crest Trail Association (PCTA). The purpose of this MOU agreement is to facilitate the management of the PCT, coordinate the development and distribution of educational materials, encourage volunteer involvement, and to recognize the PCTA as the government's major partner in the operation of the trail.

The OLR can recommend a combination of land acquisitions, conservation easements and/or trail relocations in order to preserve the purposes for which the trail was established. The current emphasis and immediate need for trail relocation is to identify routes away from public roads, utility corridors, and areas of habitation to improve user safety. Lack of adequate funding and/or unwilling sellers during the PCT's initial construction resulted in locating several segments of the PCT on interim routes along public roads, utility-line corridors, and on narrow, non-restrictive private easements that provide little if any protection to the trail or its users. These interim routes have created conflicts with motorists and landowners, leading to concerns that portions of the current route fail to meet the intent of the National Trails System Act of 1968. To further exacerbate the problem, many trail segments are located in less than optimal locations, and constantly evolving land uses have resulted in residential and commercial encroachment on the PCT and within the trail corridor. The OLR identifies the best possible location for the PCT regardless of land ownership or construction needs. The decision for the optimal trail location is based upon the desired PCT experience and follows the criteria outlined in the PCT Comprehensive Plan. The OLR process establishes a systematic framework to protect the PCT by improving the trail corridor where the PCT crosses private lands. In an effort to protect the trail experience from urban encroachment, the private lands identified within the trail corridor are recommended for acquisition and/or conservation easements. The OLR verifies the PCT is optimally located prior to pursuing parcel acquisition and/or conservation easements.

All Federal Actions, whether located on federal or non-federal land, are subject to compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). Acquisition of land or interest in land, however, is Categorically Excluded from further analysis and documentation in an environmental impact statement (EIS) or environmental assessment (EA). A proposed action to relocate a section of a congressionally designated area, such as the PCT, is an extraordinary circumstance that requires further analysis and documentation to comply with NEPA. When relocating a segment of the PCT is recommended, the OLR process functions as the analysis which establishes the purpose and need to begin a NEPA analysis. The OLR is neither a substitute for NEPA compliance nor the legal requirements for publishing major shifts for the location of the PCT in the Federal Register. The final OLR report and NEPA documentation sets the stage for publishing a notice in the Federal Register which describes the trail relocation.

**Description of the Current Route (South to North) and Statement of the Problem:**

The following individuals participated in the field review for this OLR on August 24, 2006.

- Liz LaPorta: US Forest Service TEAMS Enterprise
- Bill Sobieralski (Wilderness & Trails): Snoqualmie Ranger District
- Mike Dawson: Trail Operations Director; Pacific Crest Trail Association (PCTA)
- Scott Eby, Fran Troje, Mary Lynch, Lynn Hyde; The Mountaineers
- Elizabeth Lunney: Executive Director; Washington Trails Association

This OLR studies a 5 mile segment of the PCT in the Snoqualmie Pass Area of King and Kittitas counties. The segment begins south of Lodge Lake in section 8, T22N, R11E and ends at the Alpine Lakes Wilderness boundary in section 33, T23N, R11E (WM), and is completely located within the USFS Alpine Lakes Management Unit of the Mount Baker Snoqualmie National Forest. Approximately 0.75 miles of this segment is located within the permit boundary of the Snoqualmie Summit Ski Area, and approximately 0.25 miles is located within private land. This segment is currently located within the official location as described in the Federal Register of January 30, 1973 (p 2832, 2833, 2847, Vol. 38, #19, Part II). The attached map depicts the project area.

After the PCT passes by Lodge Lake, it enters private land for approximately 0.25 miles in the SE ¼ of section 5, T22N, R11E. There is no easement to grant the PCT access through this private property. The trail re-enters National Forest land and the Snoqualmie Summit Ski Area in section 4, T22N, R11E. Views of the surrounding peaks, the developed ski area, and Interstate-90 (I-90) can be seen from the PCT as it descends across the ski-slope, crosses a primitive dirt ski lift access road, and crosses under several ski lift lines to the trailhead south of I-90. From the southbound trailhead, the PCT heads north through a parking lot for 1,760 feet, follows the two-lane paved Alpental Ski Area Highway for 920 feet, crosses under I-90, and ascends a short distance to the northbound trailhead. From the northbound trailhead, the PCT ascends a gentle slope in a northerly direction for 1,300 feet and passes the east edge of private property in section 33, T23N, R11E. The private property has been harvested and tall young-growth timber remains. Protection of the trail experience from land development is the primary problem for the PCT in this area.

**Trail Objectives:**

The following trail objectives will build and maintain public support of the PCT in the area.

1. Maintain the trail in the most natural, safe location which avoids the impacts of adjacent land development and situations where human activity is potentially dangerous to the trail user.
2. For the optimal route, develop a trail corridor that will facilitate protection for the PCT.
3. Protect the trail experience from land development and urban encroachment by acquiring private land in fee or placing conservation easements within the trail corridor.

April 2013



View of I-90 and the Snoqualmie Summit Ski Area from the PCT



The PCT crosses under several ski lifts at the Snoqualmie Summit Ski Area.



Southbound PCT Trailhead



Northbound PCT Trailhead

**Route Options Considered:**

In section 4, T22N, R11E, it would be challenging to relocate the one mile of trail that goes through the developed ski facility. The freeway loops through Snoqualmie Pass leaving steep slopes west of the current PCT location and developed ski areas both south and north of I-90. Relocating the trail through The Mountaineers property provides the only feasible route option for the PCT.

**The Mountaineers route option** would entail three miles of trail relocation. From the current PCT route north of Lodge Lake, the relocation would ascend 0.25 miles on National Forest up a steep slope towards a saddle that leads the new route onto private land. At the saddle lies a dirt road that divides the Mountaineers property (see Table 2, Parcel B-2 and C-2) from a small sliver of land owned by CNL Income Snoqualmie LLC (see Table 1, Parcel A). Once on private property, the PCT would descend one-mile of switchbacks down through an abandoned ski lift clearing and towards SR906 and I-90. This option would pass adjacent to The Mountaineers Lodge, which burned down during the summer of 2006. After departing The Mountaineers property, the trail would cross SR906, head north towards a parking lot, and utilize a small area that is forested prior to crossing under Interstate-90 at Exit 53. The new location would head north through National Forest for approximately one mile prior to connecting back to the current route. The existing, more developed northbound trailhead would still be a major access point for the trail. The existing PCT route would become a short spur trail connecting the northbound trailhead to the PCT where the new route would head south across I-90.

**Advantages for the Mountaineers Route Option:**

The Mountaineers Route Option would enhance the trail experience because:

- The new location would not be located under any ski lifts.
- The Mountaineer property is the only relatively undeveloped piece of land on the face of the mountain. Relocating the PCT onto this property would protect the trail experience from urban encroachment and expansion of the ski area.
- This option would provide a shorter road-walk to cross under I-90.
- This option would utilize existing forested areas to buffer the PCT from adjacent road traffic in the areas surrounding the under-crossing of I-90.
- This option could provide winter access to PCT south of Snoqualmie Pass without conflicts associated with downhill ski areas.

**Disadvantages for the Mountaineers Route Option:**

- The new trail would ascend and descend a steep slope that would require building several switchbacks to avoid having a steep trail grade.
- A new trailhead parking facility may be required near Snoqualmie Pass Fire Station 291 to accommodate recreation users traveling south on the PCT.

**Advantages of the current PCT location:**

- Avoids the steep climb that associated with The Mountaineers property.
- Descends at an easy grade through the Snoqualmie Summit Ski area.
- Does not require new trailhead and parking for PCT south access.

**Disadvantages of the current PCT location:**

- The PCT crosses under several ski lifts.
- There are plans for expansion of the ski area to build additional ski lifts and utilities that would cross over the PCT.
- Winter access to PCT south of Snoqualmie Pass for snowshoers and backcountry skiers conflicts with downhill skiers and grooming activities.



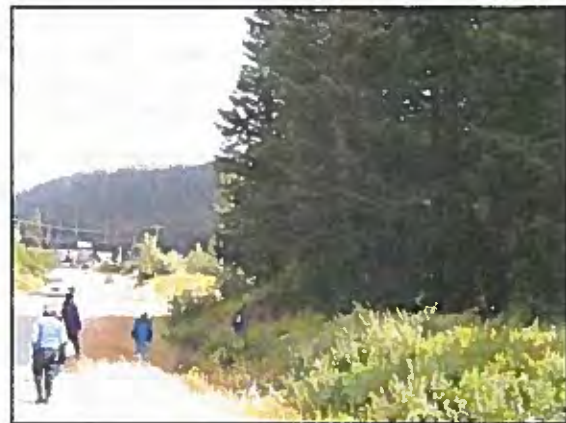
April 2013



View of the abandoned ski slope on the Mountaineers property and The Mountaineers Lodge that burned in 2006



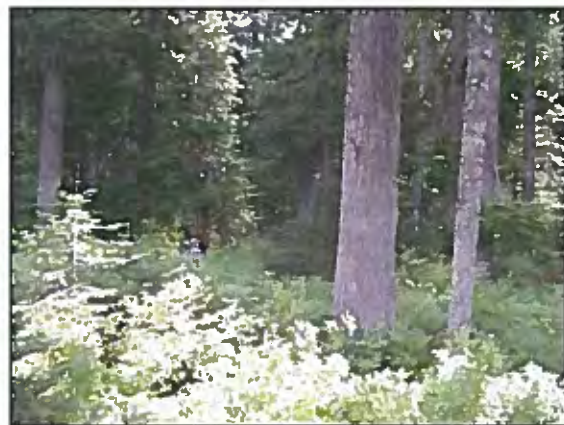
New trailhead and parking near Snoqualmie Pass Fire Station for PCT south access



The new route would enter a forested area prior to crossing under I-90



New location to cross under I-90



After crossing under I-90, the new route would enter National Forest for one mile prior to connecting with the existing PCT route

**Optimal Trail Location:**

The existing PCT is located between Lodge Lake and the boundary of the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. North of Lodge Lake the PCT traverses the slopes of Snoqualmie Summit Ski Area before crossing under I-90. The disadvantage to its current location is the several ski lifts and the future potential to expand the number of ski lifts that cross over the PCT. The ski lifts detract from an optimal trail experience. The current PCT management criteria in the PCT Comprehensive Plan and the Mt Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest's Land Management Plan allows for some types of uses to occur depending on where the PCT passes through. As the criteria are currently written, it is acceptable to have ski lifts over the PCT in a developed ski area. The criterion does not state the limit for having too many ski lifts and how this detracts from an optimal trail experience.

The Mountaineers route option is the optimal location for the PCT at the Snoqualmie Pass area, and is a necessary relocation that will preserve the purposes for which the PCT was established. This route option meets the trail objectives by providing a natural, safe location which avoids the impacts of adjacent land development and situations where human activity is potentially dangerous to the trail user. The PCT Comprehensive Plan makes it clear that the trail should be available year-round for non-motorized use. The current route through the ski area combines two incompatible types of recreation; downhill skiing and winter use of the PCT. As the ski area's Master Development Plan continues to be implemented, further conflicts can be avoided by separating these two incompatible types of recreation. This OLR recommends the following:

- Until relocation is feasible, the USFS needs to acquire an easement to grant public access for the PCT in its current location through Parcel A.
- Utilize either fee acquisition or placement of conservation easements for the private lands that falls within the PCT corridor throughout this segment. If fee acquisition by the US Forest Service is not attainable, it is a desired outcome for the private land owner to place a conservation easement on the private parcels identified in this review. This will develop a trail corridor that facilitates protection of the trail experience from land development and urban encroachment. The trail corridor is shown on the attached map.

April 2013

Signing this Optimal Location Review document indicates concurrence that:

- The recommendations in this Optimal Location Review document preserve the purposes for which the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail (PCT) was established, and promote a sound land management program in accordance with established multiple-use principles.
- The recommendations in this Optimal Location Review document do not override the Mt Baker - Snoqualmie National Forest's adopted Land Management Plan objectives.
- Acquisition and/or conservation easements placed on the private parcels depicted in Table 2 will develop a trail corridor along the optimal route for the PCT and will provide protection of the trail experience from future land development on private land.
- Acquiring an easement for the private parcel depicted as Parcel A is needed to provide public access for the current PCT location on that property.

<p>Recommended by:</p> <p><u>William Sobieralski</u> <u>4/10/2013</u> Bill Sobieralski Date Wilderness &amp; Trails Coordinator Snoqualmie Ranger District</p>	<p>Recommended by:</p> <p><u>Bob Woods</u> <u>4/8/13</u> Bob Woods Date North Cascades Regional Representative Pacific Crest Trail Association</p>
<p>Recommended by:</p> <p><u>Beth Boyst</u> <u>4/5/2013</u> Beth Boyst Date Pacific Crest Trail Program Manager USDA Forest Service, Pacific SW Region</p>	<p>Recommended by:</p> <p><u>Liz Bergeron</u> <u>4/4/2013</u> Liz Bergeron Date Executive Director and CEO Pacific Crest Trail Association</p>
<p>Recommended by:</p> <p><u>Jim Franzel</u> <u>4/9/2013</u> Jim Franzel Date Snoqualmie District Ranger Mt Baker - Snoqualmie National Forest</p>	<p>Approved by:</p> <p><u>Jennifer Ebertien</u> <u>4/3/13</u> Jennifer Ebertien Date Forest Supervisor Mt Baker - Snoqualmie National Forest</p>
<p>Recommended by:</p> <p><u>Judy Hallisey</u> <u>5-28-13</u> Judy Hallisey Date Cle Elum District Ranger Okanagon - Wenatchee National Forest</p>	

**Trail Acquisition Corridor:**

GIS technology is used to create the trail corridor by developing a viewshed of what can be seen from the optimal trail location.

- Where the viewshed is greater than ½ mile and the trail is located adjacent to or within a developed community, highway, or flat fallow land; the trail corridor is a maximum distance of 300 feet on either side of the trail centerline.
- In all other locations where the viewshed is greater than ½ mile, the trail corridor is a maximum distance of ½ mile on either side of the trail centerline.

The segment reviewed within this OLR is located within a developed ski area; therefore the trail corridor is a maximum distance of 300 feet on either side of the trail centerline. A 600-foot wide corridor is adequate to protect the trail experience in this location. Priority 1 Parcels occur where the PCT passes through private land and Priority 2 Parcels occur where the PCT does not pass through private land but the parcels fall within the trail corridor. At the time acquisition is pursued, actual acreage considered for acquisition will be determined through a process involving the US Forest Service, local government, and the PCTA.

**Table 1 – Parcels identified to fall within the PCT Trail Corridor for the Current Route**

Parcel-ID	Parcel Priority	APN#	Land Owner	Parcel Acres	Easement Status
A	1	22-11-05000-0001 Kittitas County Wenatchee NF	CNL Income Snoqualmie LLC	10	NO CURRENT EASEMENT
B	2	3323119014 King County Mt Baker - Snoqualmie NF	Scott Loners	45.51	
<b>Total Acres:</b>				<b>55.51</b>	

**Table 2 –  
Parcels identified to fall within the PCT Trail Corridor for the Mountaineers Route Option**

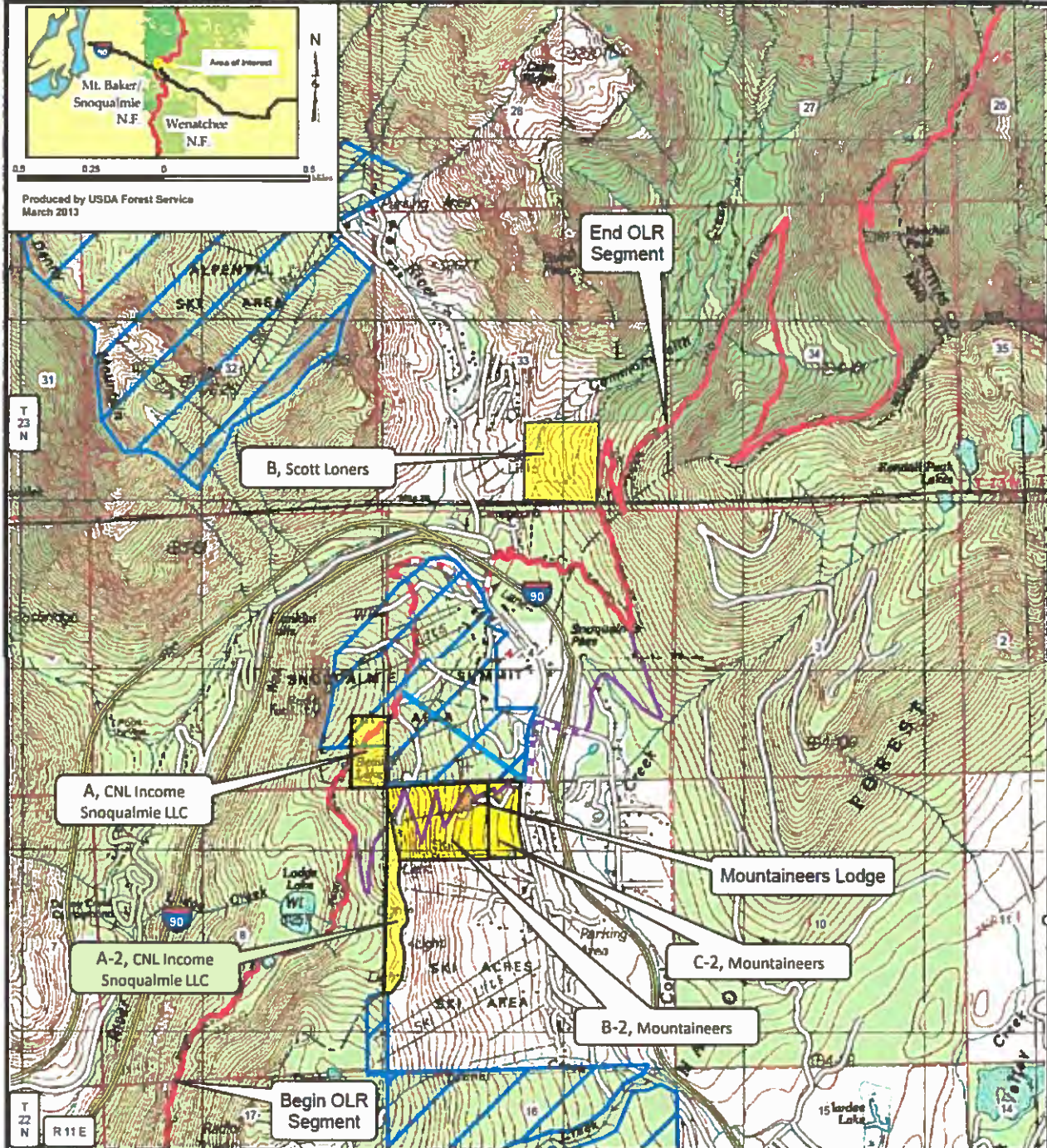
Parcel-ID	Parcel Priority	APN#	Land Owner	Parcel Acres
A-2	1	0922119001 Kittitas County Wenatchee NF	CNL Income Snoqualmie LLC	19.76
B-2	1	22-11-09020-0002 Kittitas County Wenatchee NF	The Mountaineers	60.44
C-2	1	22-11-09020-0001 Kittitas County Wenatchee NF	The Mountaineers	17
<b>Total Acres:</b>				<b>97.20</b>





# Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail Snoqualmie Pass Optimal Location Review

Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie & Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forests



Produced by USDA Forest Service  
March 2013

- Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail
- - - Pacific Crest Trail – Road Walk
- Alternative Route Option
- - - Alternative Route Option – Road Walk
- Forest Service - Alpine Lakes Wilderness
- Forest Service Alpine Lakes Management Unit
- Ski Area Permit Boundary
- Private Property
- Key Private Parcels

