



# Public Scoping

## Backcountry Camp Modifications 2022 Environmental Assessment



*NPS photo / Bender*

# Public Input Sought on Backcountry Camp Modifications

**Sedro Woolley, WA**—The public is invited to comment on a preliminary proposal to relocate Graybeal Hiker and Stock camps along the Brush Creek Trail and construct additional backcountry camp accommodations for the Pacific Crest Trail long-distance permit holders along the Bridge Creek Trail.

Initial feedback on the proposed action, alternatives, environmental issues that should be addressed, sources of data, and visitor experiences that should be considered by the National Park Service (NPS) in the upcoming Environmental Assessment (EA) are requested.

To review project information and provide electronic comments, go to:

<https://parkplanning.nps.gov/CampMods2022Scoping>

Comments will be accepted March 9-April 6, 2022. Hardcopy comments can be mailed to: Superintendent, 810 State Route 20, Sedro Woolley, WA 98284.

A virtual public meeting will be held on Friday, March 18 from 5-6 pm. Additional details are available on the [Meeting](#)

[Notices](#) page at the project website. If you need reasonable accommodations to attend the meeting, please email [Rob\\_Burrows@nps.gov](mailto:Rob_Burrows@nps.gov) as soon as possible. You may join the meeting on your computer or mobile device as early as 4:45 pm at this [link](#). Note that you may need to download the Microsoft Teams app to attend. Alternate audio is available at this number:

1-202-640-1187 and pass code 47603719#

Following the 30-day review, alternatives will be developed and required environmental analysis completed. The EA will be provided for public review in early summer 2022.

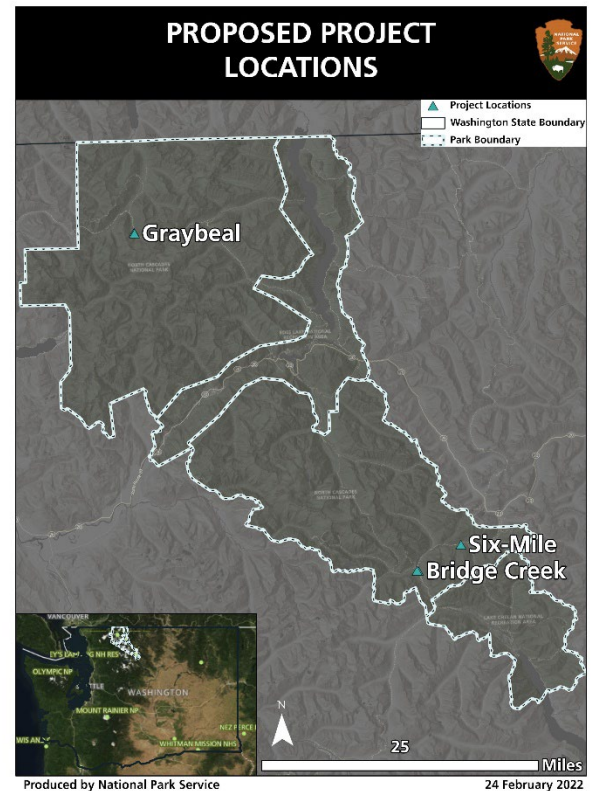
## Proposal

The NPS proposes to relocate Graybeal Hiker and Stock camps along the Brush Creek Trail and construct additional backcountry camp accommodations for the Pacific Crest Trail long-distance permit holders along the Bridge Creek Trail.

## Purpose and Need for Action

Considering recent environmental and visitor use changes, the purpose of this action is to maintain and create overnight backcountry camping opportunities, preserve wilderness character, and conserve natural and cultural resources in North Cascades National Park Service Complex by minimizing and managing the impacts associated with recreation.

The need for this project arises from the National Park Service's responsibilities mandated by the Organic Act of 1916, the Wilderness Act of 1964, and the National Trails System Act of 1968 (as amended). Maintaining the wilderness character, allowing for recreation, and minimizing impacts to resources are further addressed in





the North Cascades National Park Wilderness Management Plan (NPS 1989). These documents provide the legislative and policy framework for the NPS and its actions, including the proposed action.

Relocations of Graybeal Hiker and Stock camps are needed because of repeated flood damage by Brush Creek in 2003, 2006, and 2017. Moving campsites out of the floodplain zone prevents further damage to the camp sites and eliminates entanglement with this natural process.

Additional backcountry camp accommodations for Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail long-distance permit holders along the Bridge Creek Trail are needed to address crowding associated with increased usage on this trail in the last several years.

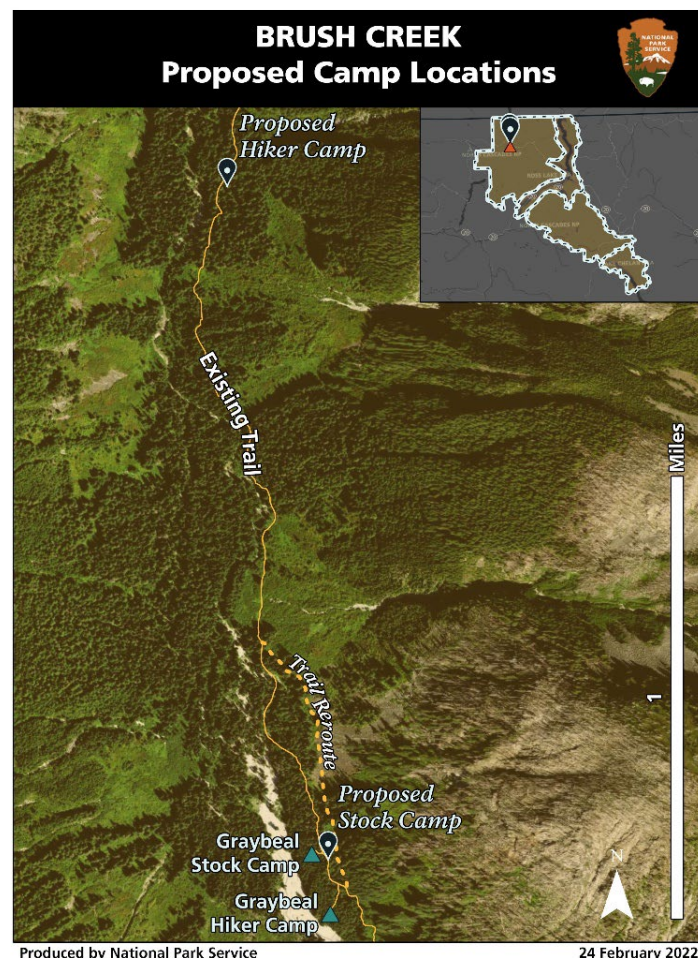
## Camps Along Brush Creek Trail

### Background

The current Graybeal hiker and stock camps are located along the Brush Creek Trail in the northwest corner of North Cascades National Park in designated wilderness. These camps are available for overnight camping with a [backcountry camping permit](#). The Brush Creek Trail connects the Chilliwack Trail with the Little Beaver Trail, providing passage over scenic Whatcom Pass. Both Graybeal camps are within a few hundred yards of each other and are located about 2 miles up the Brush Creek valley, south from the junction with the Chilliwack Trail. The Pacific Northwest National Scenic Trail follows this route.



A washed-out camp trail at Graybeal Hiker camp



The NPS endeavors to maintain this route to be passable for pack animals. Currently the trail is not passable to stock due to flood damage just downstream of the stock camp. The NPS plans to reroute the trail (see map) during the summer of 2022 or 2023.

Near the current Graybeal camps, Brush Creek is aggrading, which means sediment is being moved down the river's floodplain during high water events. This has the effect of raising the elevation of the floodplain, which makes the camps more susceptible to flooding. Floods in 2003, 2006, and 2017 eroded and deposited sediment in large portions of the hiker camp and a small portion of the stock camp. Patterns of erosion and sand deposition have forced the layout of the hiker camp into a confusing web of trails, tent pads, and cook areas that do not meet the preferred design features of camps in the Stephen Mather Wilderness (See Appendix A).



### Management Action Being Considered

The NPS proposes to relocate the hiker camp approximately 1.3 miles north of the existing location (see map). Two other locations were considered but the proposed location is the best available location with respect to soil type, terrain, and forest type. The camp is proposed to have three separate tent sites with two tent pads each. These would be separated from a common cook area by about 150 feet. An open-air pit toilet or composting toilet would be located approximately 150 feet from the cook area as well. Water would be available in nearby Brush Creek, which is greater than 200 feet away from the camp.

Although the current stock camp has not been as affected by flooding, it is likely to have increased risk of flooding in the future. Therefore, the proposal is to relocate the stock camp to higher ground nearby. It would occupy the corridor along the old trail between the existing stock and hiker camps, once the trail reroute is complete. The stock camp would have a hitch rail for several pack animals, four tent pads, and a separate cook area. The open-air pit toilet currently used for the hiker camp would be used by the new stock camp.

Capacity at these camps will remain the same.

### **Camps Along Pacific Crest Trail**

#### Background

The Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail (PCT) traverses approximately 15 miles in North Cascades National Park and approximately 3 miles in Lake Chelan National Recreation Area. There are twelve designated campsites available along this corridor for overnight camping with a backcountry camping permit. In 2020 the NPS designated Six Mile Camp and a portion of the hiker camp at Bridge Creek as drop-in camps for hikers holding the [PCT long-distance permit](#) issued by the Pacific Crest Trail Association. The drop-in camps were implemented to avoid crowding and user conflicts during peak season and provide a solution more aligned with the travel patterns of long-distance hikers.





### Management Action Being Considered

Currently Six Mile Camp has one large, trampled area with tent pads and cook area not up to the separation standards of the preferred design features. At this camp the NPS proposes to build a new separate cook area and build new tent pads to accommodate the PCT long distance permit holders now and in the future.



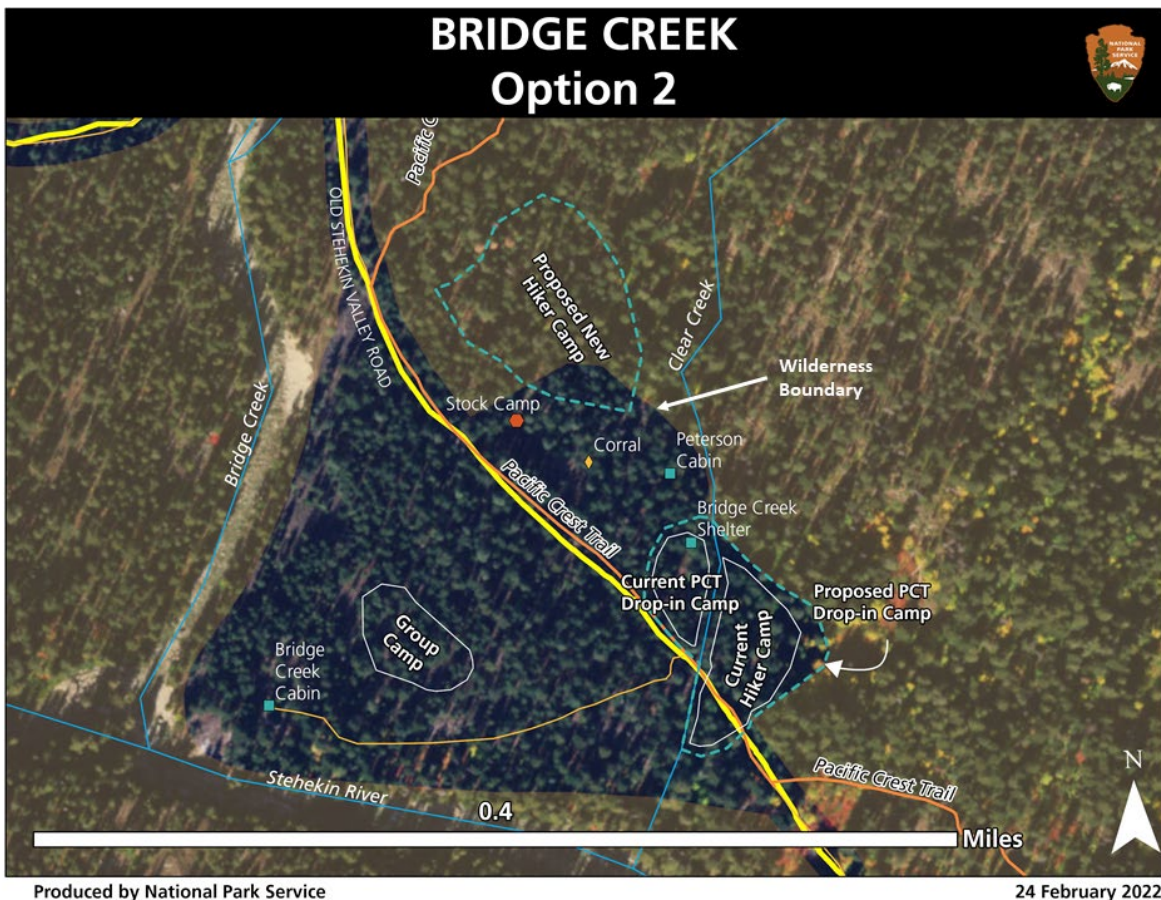
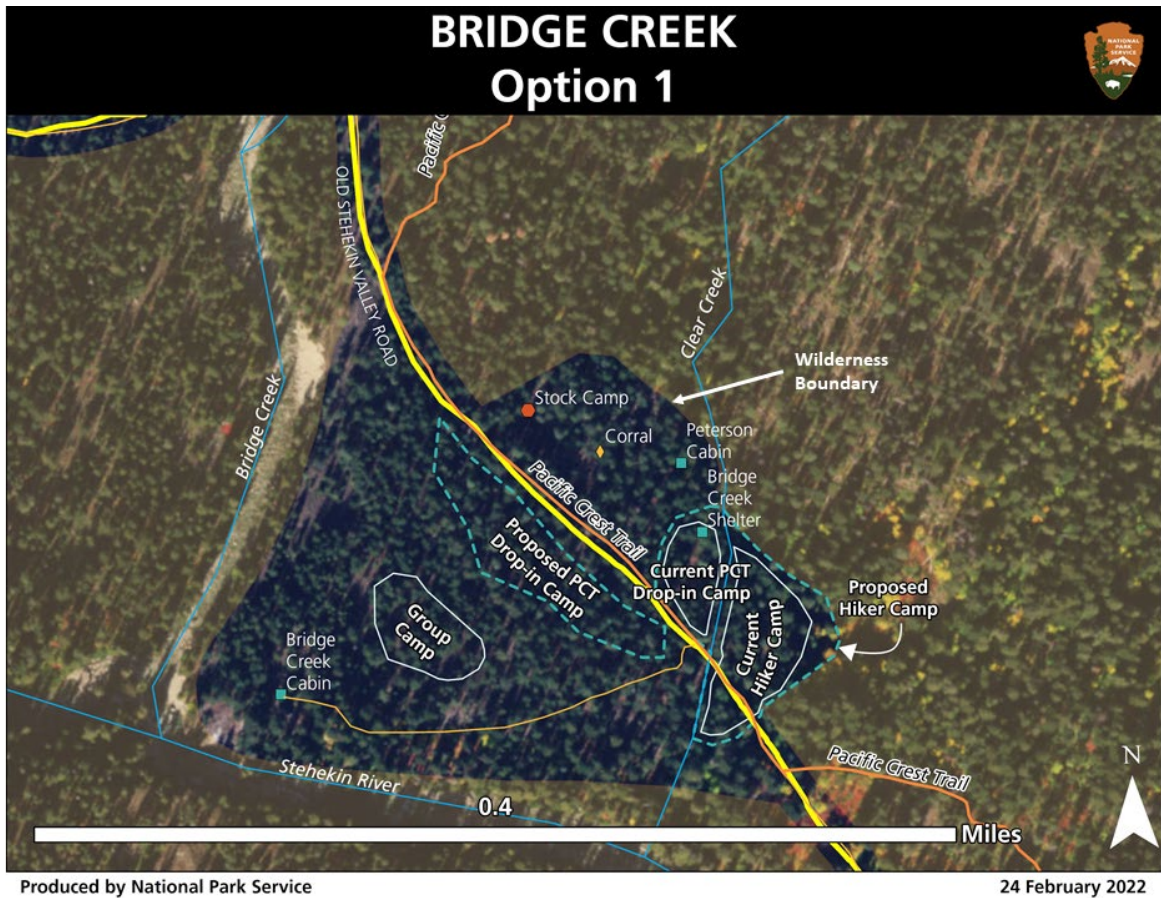
The Bridge Creek area has several camps to accommodate different users. The area has a PCT drop-in camp, a group camp area, a stock camp, corral, a hiker camp, and Tent to Tent camping area for permitted users. Currently, the PCT drop-in camp has been designated at the large open campsites on the west side of Clear Creek, with NOCA permitted hikers meant to occupy the sites on the east side of Clear Creek (see maps). The NPS is considering and seeking feedback on two options for arranging the PCT drop-in camp and the hiker camp in the Bridge Creek area:

- Option 1: The NPS would expand the current hiker camp to encompass the current PCT drop-in camp and construct a new PCT drop-in camp in the forest along the old road Stehekin Valley Road across from the stock camp, corral, and Tent to Tent camp (see map).
- Option 2: The NPS would expand the current PCT drop-in camp to encompass the current hiker camp and construct a new hiker camp above and north of the corral and stock camp (see map). This new hiker camp would be constructed in designated wilderness. Designated wilderness is the yellow shading on the maps below.



Work to construct all camps would require various hand tools, power saws, and other small power tools such as hand drills. Small signs would mark trail junctions in the camps to indicate what the spur trails lead to. Otherwise, the camps would be sited, designed, and built to satisfy as many preferred designed features outlined in Appendix A as feasible.





## Appendix A: Preferred Design Features for Stephen Mather Wilderness Camps

- Sited away from dynamic geologic processes and landforms that may disrupt the camp or endanger visitors (floodplains, debris cones, and rockfall areas)
- Does not occupy suitable or sensitive wildlife habitat (northern spotted owl and/or marbled murrelet suitable nesting habitat, grizzly or black bear, other species as applicable).
- Does not occupy rare plant habitat.
- Does not occupy sensitive archeological sites.
- If in forest, sited so that hazard tree risks are minimized and will be for the foreseeable future
- Camp at least 100 feet away from a water body
  - Personal experiences and social science show that visitors want to camp as close as possible to waterbodies. Depending on the local conditions (soils, vegetation, wildlife, and visitor use patterns), campsites could be located closer to water but would require a site-specific evaluation and containment strategy (see Marion, Wimpey, and Lawhorn 2018).
- Camp is not so far away from a water source as to be inconvenient to the user (15 min walk max?)
- Toilet is at least 200 feet away from a water body
- The cooking and food storage area are combined and is at least 100 feet away from tent pads/sleeping area to reduce risks of human bear conflict.
  - Cooking and food storage areas may be communal for multiple campsites or each individual site may have its own area. A rule of thumb could be 1 cook site for a large group camp and 1 cook site for every 2 small group campsites within the same camp area.
  - A concerted effort is needed to provide guidance to public to show where the proper cook/food storage area is.
  - A cooking area should not be so screened by topography or vegetation so that when approaching on trail you can see it if a bear was hanging around or if in the cook area one can see an approaching bear.
- Meets privacy standards: out of sight of both the main trail and other campsites.
- Camp areas are contained on terrain or in a vegetation type that resists growth of barren ground (e.g., sidehill campsites)
- As appropriate and applicable may have the following installations for visitor use mitigation:
  - Fire rings – Rock fire rings where fires are allowed.
  - Food storage – Depending on the site the NPS will provide either a wire suspended between trees in forested areas or a metal wildlife resistant storage box or will require use of a bear resistant food container.
  - Toilet (Wallowa or Composter):
    - Large group camps should have separate toilets from small group camps in the same area.
- Stock Users have some different needs and Stock Camps need to have some different PDFs:
  - Need <20% slopes as stock don't navigate steep slopes as well as people.
  - Needs generally larger area to accommodate animals
  - Not too far from water so watering is not overly time consuming (for example if animals need to be led singly to water).
  - Needs well-constructed trail to water access
  - Need a tent pad next to the hitchrails for the packer(s).

- Administrative camps have a few different standards:
  - Admin camps can have Knaack boxes
  - Some ranger camps have wood platforms (Pelton Basin and Boston Basin)
  - New camps ideally extension of existing camps to concentrate all human camping impacts in a locale.

## References and Recent Literature

Marion, J. L., Y. F. Leung, H. Eagleston, and K. Burroughs. 2016. A review and synthesis of recreation ecology research findings on visitor impacts to wilderness and protected natural areas. *Journal of Forestry* 114(3): 352–362.

Marion, J. L., J. Wimpey, and B. Lawhorn. 2018. Conflicting Messages about Camping Near Waterbodies in Wilderness: A Review of the Scientific Basis and Need for Flexibility. *International Journal of Wilderness* 24(2): 68-81.

Marion, J. L., J. Arrendondo, J. Wimpey, and F. Meadema. 2018. Applying Recreation Ecology Science to Sustainably Manage Camping Impacts: A Classification of Camping Management Strategies. *International Journal of Wilderness* 24(2): 84-101.

Marion, J. L., J. Wimpey, J. Arredondo, and F. Meadema. 2019. Sustainable Camping “Best Management Practices.” USDI U.S. Geological Survey, Virginia Tech Field Unit. Final Research Report to the USDI, National Park Service, Appalachian Trail Park Office, and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, Harpers Ferry, WV. 57 p.

National Park Service. 2012. Ross Lake National Recreation Area General Management Plan.