

DRAFT Purpose and Need

In November 2006, flooding damaged several portions of the Carbon River Road, altering the course of the Carbon River and Ipsut Creek, removing sections of existing roadway, and rerouting a portion of the Carbon River around Ipsut Creek Campground. An early December windstorm increased damage to the area. Since that time, some water from the Carbon River has continued to flow around the campground in a new Ipsut Creek channel, adjacent to instead of under the Ipsut Creek Bridge at the campground.

Deep gullies amounting to approximately 0.95 mile, or 19 percent of the road's length (5.0 miles) were formed in two different locations, at Falls Creek and beyond Chenuis Falls Picnic Area. Another approximately 600 feet (0.11 mile) (in three different areas) was damaged by removal of part or all of one lane. In addition, other portions of the road, amounting to approximately another mile were scoured such that grading and culverts would be needed if the road was stabilized or fixed. Altogether 1.06 mile is severely damaged, with approximately an additional mile that is scoured. The Federal Highway Administration Damage Survey Report describes specific locations where repair is needed, noting that more of the forest buffer between the river and the road is gone and that the river is as high as or higher than the road (FHWA 2007). Although some emergency repairs were undertaken in spring 2007 to provide for administrative and visitor access, and again in fall 2007 (as soon as was possible to avoid impacts to endangered species and to stabilize the cultural resource that is the Carbon River Road), the current condition of the road is similar to its condition after flooding in fall 2006.

Carbon River Road Damage / Area Location Guide

Mile	Feet	Area Name	Amount Missing	Notes
0	0	Carbon River Entrance	N/A	
1.22	6,450	Old Mine Trailhead	N/A	
1.25	6,600	Beginning of Falls Creek Washout	3,000 feet	Deep channel with both lanes missing
1.97	10,440	End of Falls Creek Washout / Former Falls Creek Picnic Area	(see above)	(Same as above)
1.99	10,550	Explosives Cache (100 feet off roadway)	(see above)	May not have been excluded from wilderness
3.13	16,500	Beginning of Ranger Creek Scour	200 feet	Partial lane missing
3.16	16,700	End of Ranger Creek Scour	(see above)	(Same as above)
3.60	19,190	Chenuis Falls Picnic Area	N/A	Eroding bank
3.70	19,700	Beginning of Chenuis Scour ("Little Bite")	200 feet	One Lane missing
3.77	19,900	End of Chenuis Scour ("Little Bite")	(see above)	(Same as above)
4.45	23,500	Beginning of Big Bite Washout	200 feet	Two Lanes Missing
4.49	23,700	End of Big Bite Washout	(see above)	(Same as above)
4.58	24,200	Beginning of Ipsut Scour	1,350 feet	Deep channel with both lanes missing
4.82	25,550	End of Ipsut Scour	(see above)	(Same as above)
4.84	25,566	Ipsut Creek Bridge (former channel)	100 feet	New Ipsut Creek Location (approximately same width as former Ipsut Creek Channel)
5.05	26,670	Wonderland Trailhead	N/A	

The Carbon River Road, which in some areas is lower than the aggrading Carbon River bed has been damaged by flooding many times over its history, and increasingly so over the last few decades (see *History of the Carbon River Road* below). The 2006 flood was the largest recorded at the downstream Fairfax stream gauge. As a result of long-term flooding effects, the park General Management Plan (GMP) Record of Decision (NPS 2002: 3) states that the park would eventually "close the Carbon River Road to private vehicles when there is a major washout of the road and convert the Ipsut Creek Campground to a walk-in / bike-in camping area." The 2006 fall flooding was a major washout.

This Environmental Assessment (EA) is derived from the Mount Rainier GMP. The GMP set the framework and the end result for the future of the Carbon River Road, but did not define specific criteria for the closure of the Carbon River Road.

The Mount Rainier National Park GMP also calls for the preservation of the Carbon River Road *corridor* so as to have *no adverse effect* on the Mount Rainier NHLD (NPS 2002: 255 see also 84, 113). Although the GMP calls for closure of the Carbon River Road to private vehicles following a major washout, it also provides for continued use by administrative vehicles and conversion of the road to a hike and bike trail. The GMP also identified expansion of the park boundary in the Carbon River area to provide replacement facilities for those that would be left inaccessible to private vehicles as a result of the conversion of the Carbon River Road to a hike and bike trail.

Because of effects to the Carbon River Road from recent flooding anticipated by the GMP, perhaps exacerbated by possible effects from climate change and because the remaining roadway may be unable to be maintained without the use of motorized vehicles, this Environmental Assessment will evaluate interim alternatives that meet these tenets of the GMP, while also considering long-term alternatives that may not meet all of them. The effect of recent changes to the roadway and evaluation of the ability to maintain the corridor as a hike and bike trail was not fully understood during the planning process for the GMP.

Environmental analysis is needed to determine how to proceed with closure of the Carbon River Road and what sustainable facility may be provided that would continue to provide access to the unique features of the Carbon River Valley. In planning for the future of the area, Mount Rainier National Park desires to preserve year round sustainable public access to the northwest corner of the park and to the unique and popular natural, historical and recreational features of the Carbon River Valley. This EA will define the nature and extent of future sustainable public and administrative access to the Carbon River area, including for hikers, bicyclists, vehicles, camping, parking and trails, and evaluate the ability to sustain the NHLD consistent with the Mount Rainier GMP.