

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife

Morse Creek Wildlife Area Unit closure -SEPA DNS 20-025

SEPA Review Period: May 13 – May 27, 2020

Date	Comment	WDFW Response
<p>5/25/2020</p>	<p>My understanding is that the damage caused to the Morse Creek unit was initially reported by legitimate day users of the area.</p> <p>Do you think that the people illegally camping there have left because you have closed the area?</p> <p>Or do you suppose that they are appreciating the fact that no one else is hiking in the area to see, and report, their illegal campsites?</p> <p>I would suggest that the presence of day use hikers may actually limit the illegal use of this unit and identify misuse earlier.</p> <p>Or perhaps I am mistaken and you have park rangers regularly patrolling the area and one of those FLIR equipped drones that are so handy for fighting fires orbiting overhead for several hours each night.</p> <p>-- John Hauck</p>	<p>Thank you for your comments.</p> <p>The initial reports of the encampment issues on the Morse creek wildlife area unit came from project partners who monitor the restoration site and conduct spawning surveys in Morse creek.</p> <p>Individuals have stopped “camping” on the unit likely as a result of current closures, increased enforcement patrols and actions as well as through the removal of debris related to the encampments. Local authorities have also increased patrols and enforcement efforts surrounding violations at the Morse creek unit.</p> <p>The Morse creek unit typically has a very low recreational use. Increase use by responsible recreationalist would help reduce the occurrence of homeless encampments and other unauthorized activities. The unit is not safe for recreationalist while homeless encampments are present.</p> <p>Drones have not been used on the unit.</p>
<p>5/13/2020</p>	<p>Hello Managers, No extension of the Morse Creek wildlife Unit. There should have been sufficiently time in the last six month closure to mitigate issues at</p>	<p>Thank you for your comments.</p> <p>The previous 3 month closure and associated efforts over the past year and a half aimed to halt the encampment, trespass,</p>

	<p>hand. There should have at least been a mitigating plan and time line presented to the public. Closure to the public is not acceptable.</p> <p>These are signed the WDFW has overstepped itself in the volumes of land it is trying to manage. If there are particular units of land WDFW has trouble managed those lands should be marketed back to the private sector.</p> <p>Best Regards, Gary Grahn</p>	<p>and vandalism has had significantly positive results. Time is still needed to fully stop the unauthorized activities and to ensure the issues are resolved for the long term. We want the public to return as soon as it is safe to.</p> <p>This unit and many other WDFW lands are acquired through grant funding for the conservation and protection of critical habitat. This unit is primarily manage for that purpose and secondly for recreation. Temporary closure is a management action necessary at this time to project the resource and safety of it users.</p>
5/13/2020	<p>You know what the problem is for this area, you've already outlined it in your proposal. Get in there and solve the problem, then get the heck out and get on with managing wildlife. Don't keep people out, kick the homeless, littering, public-land abusing a-holes out of there right now. Stop wasting money on 'studying' and solve the problem already.</p> <p>-Paul Stenhouse</p>	<p>Thank you for your comments.</p> <p>WDFW is not studying the issues, but rather are actively working towards resolving the rapidly occurring and growing impact to the resource at the Morse Creek unit. WDFW has and is continuing to address the issues present.</p>
5/13/2020	<p>Why is it that encampments are allowed to develop at all? If one tent goes up it should be removed the minute it's found. If as legal users we unknowingly error and camp where we shouldn't we are told to move on immediately. No one should be allowed to destroy the environment with no repercussions. Because it is allowed we now not only have the cost of repairing damaged environments and habitats but also the cost of hazardous</p>	<p>Thank you for your comments.</p> <p>Camping and encampments are not authorized at the Morse Creek unit. As encampments and camping is found, notices are given per regulations, citations are issue where possible for noncompliance, and the site is clean up.</p> <p>Clallam county jail and chain gang crews are utilized to help remove and dispose of the abandoned items. They have</p>

	<p>waste clean up. In a time of money short falls it would be much less expensive to patrol and enforce the law than the cost of clean up and repair after the fact. Due to the lack of enforcement it is the people that pay thru fees and taxes to use these areas that are punished with closures.</p> <p>-Jerry Hart</p>	<p>been excellent partners on this efforts to clean up the hazard sites on the unit.</p> <p>Agreed, preventative measures are more cost effective than reactive measures. Enforcement patrols have increased significantly within the past year at this wildlife area unit and are showing good results. More enforcement staff and dedicated time patrolling would be of use and would prevent further increase in unauthorized activities.</p>
<p>5/14/2020</p>	<p>I'm just curious, why were homeless encampments allowed to go on for so long so as to damage the ecosystem of the area? It seems logical to prevent this from happening in the first place. Complete BS.</p> <p>Thanks, Dave Pim Longtime (35 years) purchaser of licenses from WDFW</p>	<p>Thank you for your comments.</p> <p>Prevention is ideal. Many encampments are hidden and camouflaged in the valuable riparian and forested habitats. They are often hard to locate and develop rapidly. The situation is much improved, but time is still needed to fully protect the resource and protect public safety.</p>
<p>5/13/2020</p>	<p>Mr. Kelly Susewind, Director, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Ms. Lisa Wood, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife RE: Extension of closure of Morse Creek Wildlife Area near Port Angeles Mr. Susewind and Ms. Wood: I fully support the continued closure of the area until such time as the problem with the homeless encampments, trash dumping, tree-cutting, and hole-digging is resolved.</p>	<p>Thank you for your comments.</p> <p>Conservation and protection of the important habitat is essential. The Clallam County Sheriff's Office has been of great support and assistance on addressing the issues on at the Morse Creek unit.</p>

	<p>For the record: if there are other areas administered by WDFW that are being abused in this manner, I would support the closure of those areas as well.</p> <p>I am not sure who it was I spoke with on the phone in late December (or early January) after you issued the first press release about the closure on December 27, 2019 (probably Brian Calkins), but I do recall being engaged in a rather lengthy conversation with one of your staff people who graciously helped me pinpoint the area on "Google Earth" while I was speaking with him on the phone, and gave me all the gory and sordid details of the issues which resulted in the closure. I have no doubt that your notice today announcing an extension of that closure means that the problems have not yet been resolved. To reiterate my comments made on Mr. Darric Lowery's voice mail earlier this afternoon:</p> <p>We cannot allow public recreational facilities to be commandeered and trashed by homeless encampments. I do not know what the solution is for dealing with the homeless population in this country, but I do know that it is far beyond the purview of those we charge with the management and</p>	
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	<p>administration of our public lands.</p> <p>The establishment of homeless camps, the trash dumping, the tree cutting, and all the other activities associated with homeless encampments make it impossible for lands managers to achieve their management objectives. More importantly, in the larger picture, allowing the establishment of homeless encampments deprives future generations of those recreational opportunities we seek to preserve and protect by the establishment of these wildlife areas.</p> <p>The establishment of the homeless encampments, and their associated activities, is in effect robbing our children and their children of those opportunities.</p> <p>Again, I have no brilliant solutions for dealing with the homeless population, but that's a problem for the sociologists and politicians, not the lands managers. Your job is to protect the fish and birds and animals and their environments.</p> <p>I would submit as well it is (in the case of the Morse Creek Wildlife Area) the job of the Clallam County Sheriff's Office to assist you in enforcing the closure. Your notice announcing an extension of the closure indicates to me they have</p>	
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	<p>been less than effective in that regard. It's possible you may need to bring that to their attention.</p> <p>Thank you sincerely for your time and consideration.</p> <p>-Brian Kirk</p>	
5/13/2020	<p>Why haven't you moved the homeless camps out? You shouldn't have to study the problem for a year.. They are trespassing.</p> <p>-Wayne Delores Larson</p>	<p>Thank you for your comments.</p> <p>The homeless encampments are removed as soon as it becomes safe and feasible. On several occasions large and small encampments have been removed. The problem is not being studied. As soon as the homeless encampment challenges and other unauthorized activities have ceased, then the unit will reopen to the public. The Morse creek unit must be safe for the public before recreating can occur again.</p>
5/13/2020	<p>Have you ever heard of fines and jail time? How about the Sheriff's Chain Gang?</p> <p>I didn't think so.</p> <p>Larry Ohman</p>	<p>Thank you for your comments.</p> <p>Yes, citations and fines are being applied to violators of the posted rules. Yes, the Sheriff's chain gang has been and will continue to be utilized in helping clean up the encampment sites and areas vandalized.</p>