

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 20, 2026

The Honorable Michael Boren
Under Secretary, Natural Resources and Environment
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable Tom Schultz
Chief of the U.S. Forest Service
U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Under Secretary Boren and Chief Schultz:

I am writing with continued concern regarding conditions in The Enchantments area of the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. For years, day-use visitation has steadily increased for this pristine wilderness that our communities cherish. Over the past year, I have heard increasingly dire warnings from local officials, recreation groups, conservation organizations, and members of the public about inadequate U.S. Forest Service management of The Enchantments. Skyrocketing numbers of visitors in recent years were already straining management resources, and that strain has only been made worse by a reduced agency presence. I urge the Forest Service to address these persisting issues by restoring sufficient staffing and implementing a thoughtfully-designed day-use management system that aligns with the capacity of the landscape and infrastructure.

Maintaining sustainable access to some of our nation's most beautiful wilderness matters economically as well as environmentally, helping sustain the businesses and communities connected to recreation in Central Washington. The Enchantments region is one of the most visited wilderness destinations in the Pacific Northwest, supporting lodging, restaurants, retail businesses, guide services, and transportation providers in nearby communities and throughout the Wenatchee Valley. A recent Chelan County tourism impact study found that visitors spent approximately \$675 million in the county in 2024.


Its popularity reflects the extraordinary character of the landscape, but it has also brought intense recreational pressure. While the overnight permit system has helped manage overnight use, day use has exploded in recent years. On peak summer days, wilderness rangers have reported encountering more than 1,000 visitors moving through the area. The area experienced a tremendous level of activity during peak season in 2025, breaking all-time visitation records over the Fourth of July holiday and warranting 32 search and rescue operations, which unfortunately also included the tragic loss of life for two hikers. High visitation levels for just 25 miles of Forest Service trails are straining trailheads, emergency response, sanitation infrastructure, and the fragile alpine environment, increasing risk to visitor safety and forest health.

I appreciate the Forest Service's decision to hire temporary seasonal workers at the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest—that is a welcome first step. But our communities continue to raise serious concerns about the decline in Forest Service presence in the field. Since I first wrote about bathroom facilities overflowing more than nine months ago, the Forest Service has still not taken action and the waste tanks remain full, according to community partners. These tanks remain a risk to water quality and visitor safety. When maintenance falls behind or facilities are unavailable during the season, the strain on the surrounding environment can increase quickly. When staffing levels are insufficient, these responsibilities become much more difficult to carry out, particularly in locations experiencing very high visitation. The need to focus on overwhelmed facilities also means that wilderness rangers and other personnel are unable to carry out their other valuable, traditional duties related to education, trail maintenance, and compliance support.

These issues in The Enchantments are not new. Stakeholders and land managers have been discussing these pressures for many years, but a record-breaking number of visits and staffing reductions last year have led to an immediate need. I urge the Forest Service to hire staff to meet baseline needs and to develop a day-use management strategy for The Enchantments that aligns with the capacity of the landscape and infrastructure. Thoughtfully designed tools, such as permits, parking management strategies, or other visitor use measures, can help reduce negative impacts while still allowing visitors to experience this extraordinary place. A balanced approach that protects the fragile alpine environment while maintaining meaningful public access would benefit both visitors and the long-term stewardship of the area.

Thank you for your time and work in stewarding this extraordinary landscape. I look forward to working with you to preserve responsible public access to The Enchantments.

Sincerely,



Kim Schrier, M.D.
Member of Congress