

**WHATCOM COUNTY**  
**Chair**  
**Parks & Recreation Commission**

3373 Mount Baker Highway  
Bellingham, WA 98226-9097



**Sonja Max,**

From: Whatcom County Parks and Recreation Commission  
Sonja Max, Franklin Boteler, Kristen Fagan, Joseph Hashmall, Carl Weimer, Sheli Moore, Geoff Klise

To: Whatcom County Council  
Kaylee Galloway, Todd Donovan, Tyler Byrd, Mark Stremmer, Ben Elenbaas, Barry Buchanan, Jon Scanlon

January 19, 2024

RE: DNR – Anderson Creek/Brokedown Palace Transfers from Trust Status

Dear Whatcom County Council Members,

On behalf of the Whatcom County Parks and Recreation Commission, I am writing to express our concern about DNR's transfer proposal for Anderson Creek and Brokedown Palace properties to potentially Natural Resources Conservation Areas (NRCA) status per Hilary Franz's December 18<sup>th</sup> letter to Council.

The Commission supports DNR's efforts for maintaining carbon-dense forests to help mitigate the effects of climate change, protect habitat and preserve scenic areas. However, the potential NRCA designation appears to possibly limit two types of recreation that contribute significantly to the economy and character of Whatcom County, namely mountain biking and horseback riding. While we support the purpose of these transfers it is unclear from what we have seen the exact designation for these transferred lands, and the restrictions those designations may have on outdoor recreation. For those reasons we ask that it be clarified that whatever designation the transferred lands fall within, that accommodations or exceptions will be made to ensure that non-motorized uses such as hiking, mountain biking, and horseback riding be allowed where they already exist and where they are already planned for.

Planned trails intended for multiple users (including mountain biking and horseback riding) approved by Council on the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan cross through the areas identified as Anderson Creek and Brokedown Palace. Recently proposed trails that have not yet been adopted into the Comprehensive Plan also overlap with the proposed transfer areas. The DNR's own Non-motorized Recreation Plan even includes planned recreation access in potential direct conflict with the areas that may be designated NRCA. Maps of these planned trails and recreation areas are attached.

The Commission believes that multi-use recreation access and structurally dense, carbon-rich forests can successfully co-exist. In fact, the DNR's Harriet A. Spanel Natural Area Reserve (NAR) on Blanchard Mountain is a prime example of this.

We request that *one* of the following three things are negotiated with DNR prior to approving this land transfer: 1) That multi-user recreation access is guaranteed for hiking, trail running, mountain biking and equestrian use in these proposed transfer areas; 2) That the areas in question be designated so as to accommodate non-motorized recreation, such as NAR instead of NRCA; or 3) That the boundaries of the potential NRCA areas are redrawn to not overlap with planned trail access.

We also believe that DNR has put undue pressure on the County Council to make a rushed decision on this matter, and recommend that in the future, Council request DNR to allow the County additional time to adequately discuss and research significant and irreversible land transfers.

The Commission very much appreciates your attention to this matter, and thanks you for continuing to support those who choose to recreate in Whatcom County.

Sincerely,

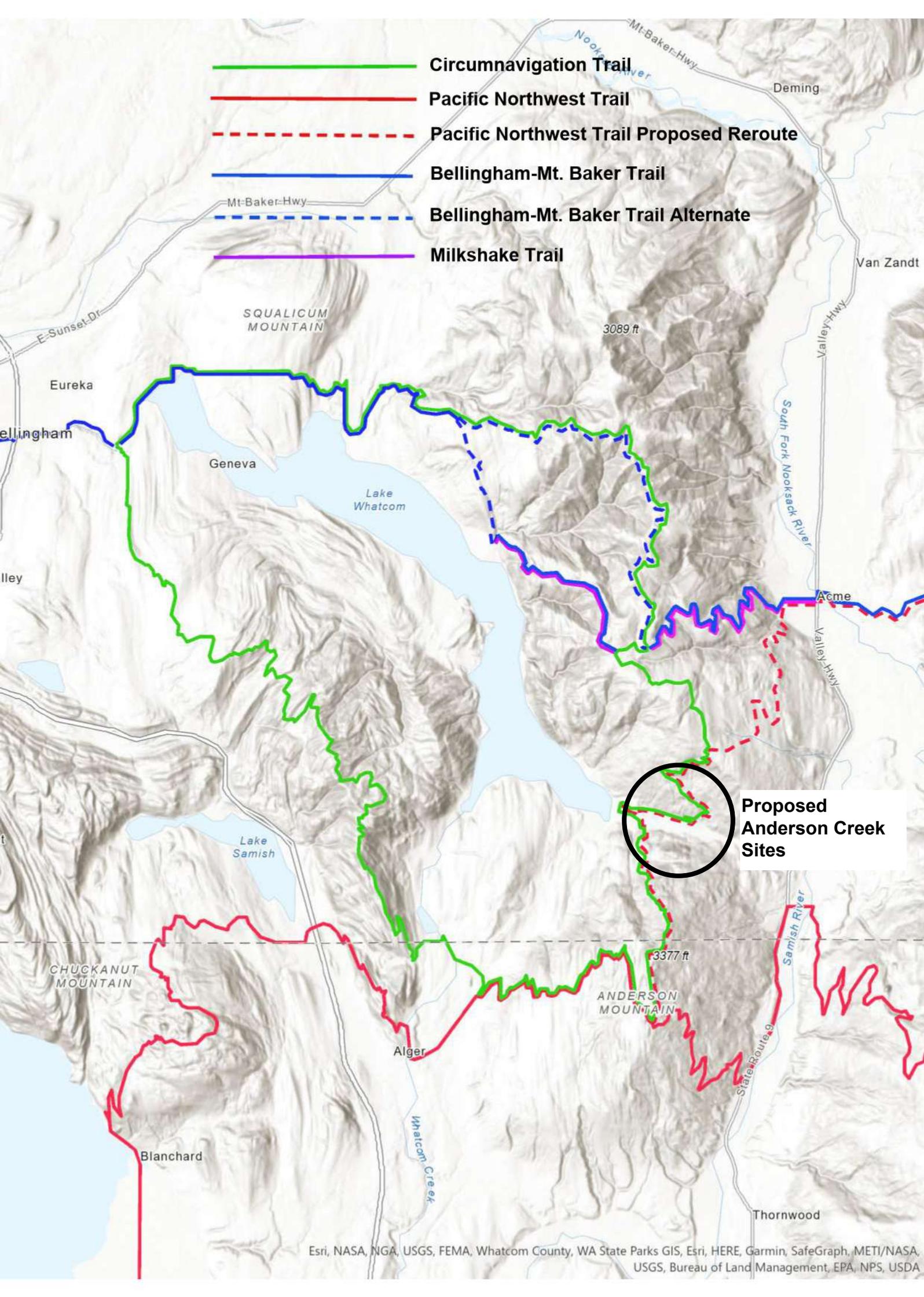
Sonja Max  
Chair, Whatcom County Parks and Recreation Commission

Attachments:

- 1: DNR Baker to Bellingham Non-motorized Recreation Plan Map overlaid with Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan's Planned Bellingham to Baker Trail Corridor
- 2: Proposed trail (hike/bike/equestrian) circumnavigating lake Whatcom
- 3: Excerpt from DNR's Baker to Bellingham Non-motorized Recreation Plan describing future recreation opportunities that directly overlap the proposed Anderson Creek site.



-  Circumnavigation Trail
-  Pacific Northwest Trail
-  Pacific Northwest Trail Proposed Reroute
-  Bellingham-Mt. Baker Trail
-  Bellingham-Mt. Baker Trail Alternate
-  Milkshake Trail



**Proposed Anderson Creek Sites**

land should another state agency, local government body, or organized group of individuals convene a planning committee of stakeholders.

Excerpted from DNR Baker to Bellingham Non-Motorized Recreation Plan  
<https://www.dnr.wa.gov/BakertoBellingham>

### **Strategies**

1. Work with land managers (public and private) and stakeholders to participate in public input driven planning processes that include DNR land.
2. As these opportunities are presented, engage with necessary parties to encourage the design and development of non-motorized trails that are consistent with DNR's standards, stewardship responsibilities, suitability criteria, safety and risk management, and user experience.

### **North Fork Unit, Red Mountain Unit, Mirror Lake Unit and Stewart Mountain Unit**

**Objective C:** Provide non-motorized trail opportunities for horseback riding, hiking and mountain biking based on available staffing, funding and resources.

### **Strategies**

1. Inventory and evaluate the non-motorized trail zones identified on the Concept Map (Figure 3) for a non-motorized trail system.
2. Partner with the public to identify trail location options.
3. Work to plan, design and develop a variety of non-motorized trails for hiking, horseback riding and mountain biking.

**Objective D:** Provide non-motorized trail connections to Whatcom County parks – Lake Whatcom Park, Canyon Lake Community Forest and Silver Lake Park, based on available staffing, funding and resources.

### **Strategies**

1. Work (establish partnership) with Whatcom County Parks and Recreation Department, to identify potential linkage routes for connecting to existing and proposed county trails in Lake Whatcom Park, Canyon Lake Community Forest, and Silver Lake Park.
2. Evaluate areas that could be suitable for locating multi-use trail connectors.
3. Design and develop trails with compatible connections to county trails.