

Recreational opportunities and facilities

Objective R-1: Expand recreational opportunities and access

THE NEED: Many recreation opportunities exist in the Carbon River Corridor, especially within the area’s national forest and national park. There is great pressure from the public and local user groups to increase recreational access for hiking, biking, and off-road vehicles; in the 2020 public survey, 27% of respondents requested additional hiking opportunities, 22% requested additional ORV opportunities and 17% requested mountain biking facilities. Expansion, however, should only take place as services and infrastructure exist to support increased use of the area.

[Graphic for this section: Location maps of existing trails and ORV park]

Hiking trails

There are many formal and informal hiking trails throughout the corridor managed by multiple agencies and landowners. There is growing demand for more hiking trails in the area, greater coordination between landowners, and improved public information about access to trails.

We heard you!

Public and stakeholder input included:

- Desire for additional recreational opportunities and infrastructure, such as:
 - Hiking trails and facilities.
 - Drive-in campgrounds.
 - Hike/bike/ride-in campgrounds.
 - ORV/ATV trails and facilities.
 - Mountain bike trails and facilities.
- Enhancing infrastructure:
 - Parking
 - Roads

The following actions will be undertaken to improve opportunities for hiking in the corridor:

Action	Lead Organization	Partners
R-1-1 Explore the opportunity to repair the Rainforest Trail within Mount Rainier National Park.	National Park Service – Mount Rainier National Park	Washington Trails Association, Washington’s Nation Park Fund, private donors
R-1-2 Explore the opportunity to repair the Historic Boundary Trail inside Mount Rainier National Park.	National Park Service – Mount Rainier National Park	US Forest Service, Washington Trails Association
R-1-3 Complete the Foothills Trail from Wilkeson to Mount Rainier National Park Carbon River Entrance.	Pierce County Parks	Foothills Rails to Trails Coalition, National Park Service – Mount Rainier National Park, Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance,

		ForeverGreen Trails, Washington Trails Association
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Other trails

Interest in additional biking, equestrian, and motorized vehicle trails were noted in public surveys and conversations with stakeholders along the corridor. Developing these additional recreational opportunities can reduce unsanctioned activities and provide visitors a safer experience.

The following actions will be undertaken to improve opportunities for other trails in the corridor:

Action	Lead Organization	Partners
R-1-4 Explore opportunities for recreational use on Pierce County Parks property. *	Pierce County Parks	Recreational user groups
R-1-5 Explore opening the Evans Creek ORV Park to winter sports and explore other expansion opportunities.	US Forest Service	Pierce County Parks, Washington State Department of Transportation
R-1-6 Evaluate the expansion of ORV opportunities throughout the corridor.	TBD	TBD

*Feasibility studies would need to be completed to ensure these uses are compatible with deed restrictions and geographic constraints.

Camping areas

The Carbon River Corridor has a limited number of campgrounds in the area as well as a tradition of dispersed camping opportunities, which have become problematic in some areas. Long-term camping, a lack of clarity regarding property boundaries, and excessive amounts of trash have all been identified as issues related to dispersed camping. A small, hosted campground is available at Evans Creek ORV Park, hike- or bike-in camping is available in the national park, at Ipsut Creek and Mowich Lake, and dispersed camping is allowed on national forest land.

While drive-in campgrounds were identified as an interest in public surveys, landowners in the area are generally not able to meet this need because of safety and sustainability concerns. However, opportunities do exist for private development of campgrounds, should an entity be interested in leasing a property to establishing a campground, or a private landowner chooses to develop their land, as such. It is to be noted that all new or expanded camping opportunities must include consideration for parking and safety.

Action	Lead Organization	Partners
R-1-7 Lease out private property to a third-party to develop a hosted campground.	Fruit Growers Supply Company	TBD

R-1-8 Develop a private campground for members or the public with a fee.	Carbon Glacier Club, Mountaineers	TBD
R-1-9 Develop hike- and bike-in camping opportunities along the Foothills Trail.	Foothills Rails to Trails Coalition	TBD

Day use/picnic areas

Developed day-use/picnic areas are limited in the Carbon River Corridor. There is a public demand for these areas, but few resources to develop them in the near-term as they require parking and restroom facility development as well as regular servicing.

Action	Lead Organization	Partners
R-1-10 Expand development at Coke Ovens Park.	Town of Wilkeson	Pierce County, Foothills Historical Society, Department of Archaeology & Historic Preservation
R-1-11 Evaluate visitor opportunities at historical Fairfax Townsite.	Pierce County Parks	TBD

Transportation

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the number of cars parked illegally or unsafely throughout the corridor on sunny days is already high and continues to grow. Inappropriately parked cars regularly block roadways, driveways, and mailboxes and limit sight distance for other drivers. To decrease the number of cars attempting to park in the corridor, Mount Rainier National Park has suggested a private shuttle service to transport visitors to and from key locations such as trail heads and the national park entrance.

Action	Lead Organization	Partners
R-1-12 Mount Rainier National Park may evaluate business opportunities for hiker shuttles in the Carbon River Corridor	National Park Service – Mount Rainier National Park	Town of Wilkeson

Objective R-2: Develop infrastructure and expand visitor services to support increased demand

THE NEED: One of the challenges for increasing visitation is the lack of infrastructure in the corridor. Developing infrastructure that will guide visitors to the area to make informed decisions is important as demand for use of the area increases; however, investment in and location of infrastructure is complex and will require collaboration by landowners throughout the corridor to accomplish, as the topography and other natural features in the corridor make location of infrastructure challenging.

We heard you!

Public and stakeholder input included:

- Expanding visitor services and information
- Enhancing infrastructure:
 - Parking
 - Roads
 - Signage
 - Public restrooms

Visitor services such as information, restrooms and parking are extremely limited throughout the corridor. A parking lot, restroom and information kiosk have been constructed in Wilkeson and another small parking lot is adjacent to the Foothills Trail in Carbonado. The Foothills Rails to Trails Coalition supports another small parking lot near the Fairfax Bridge. Mount Rainier National Park maintains a set of vault toilets at the Carbon River entrance to the park, adjacent to the existing parking area. The lack of visitor services is a significant issue both for visitors, who often get lost and are frustrated by the lack of facilities and for locals, who face pressure from visitors parking in unauthorized and unsafe locations and must deal with garbage and litter left behind. While Mount Rainier National Park staffs a ranger contact station near the Carbon River entrance, this location has no public restrooms and does not provide access to water for visitors.

Roads and bridges

Improvements to road and bridge maintenance, trash clean-up, and additional access points are necessary for the safety of residents and visitors. These items form some of the foundation for other actions in this plan.

Action	Lead Organization	Partners
R-2-1 Form a road maintenance work group between landowners and agencies responsible for roadways in the corridor.	Pierce County Parks	Pierce County Planning and Public Works and Parks Departments, Washington State Department of Transportation, National Park Service – Mount Rainier National Park, and US Forest Service
R-2-2 Repair the roadway inside Mount Rainier National Park near the Carbon River entrance.	National Park Service – Mount Rainier National Park	TBD
R-2-3	TBD	Friends of the Carbon River, Carbon River Forum, Washington State

Encourage local organizations, residents, recreational groups, and visitors to participate in Adopt-a-Highway (state) and Adopt-a-Road (county) volunteer litter clean-up programs.		Department of Transportation, Pierce County Planning and Public Works
R-2-4 Build a pedestrian bridge over the Carbon River connecting future recreational properties, such as Fairfax Townsite, Foothills Trail, etc.	Pierce County Parks	Foothills Rails to Trails Coalition
R-2-5 Explore options to improve roads to and across the Manley Moore bridge for access to the Fairfax Townsite (see R-1-11).	Pierce County Planning and Public Works	TBD

Roadway signage

Residents, area visitors, and landowners have identified signage leading to and through the corridor as a major challenge. Visitors often seek Paradise or Sunrise entrances to Mount Rainier National Park and find their way to the Carbon River entrance which has extremely limited visitor services and no cellular service. Improving roadway signage will reduce the number of visitors who find their way to the Carbon River corridor by accident and improve their ability to find the services and destinations they seek. For signage related to visitor information and education, see Objective I-1.

Action	Lead Organization	Partners
R-2-6 Develop a signage work group to take a holistic approach to wayfinding to and through the corridor and recommend appropriate signage improvements.	TBD	Town of Wilkeson, Town of Carbonado, Pierce County, Washington State Department of Transportation, National Park Service – Mount Rainier National Park, US Forest Service
R-2-7 Improve safety at the Fairfax Bridge by mitigating hazardous parking in the area with signage.	Pierce County Planning and Public Works	Pierce County Parks, Pierce County Sheriff
R-2-8 Install new signage in the corridor based on the work group	Washington State Department of Transportation, Pierce	National Park Service – Mount Rainier National

recommendations (contingent on R-2-6).	County Planning and Public Works	Park, Towns, US Forest Service
R-2-9 Install signage at seasonal road closure locations to explain closure and rules to visitors.	US Forest Service	US Forest Service, Washington State Department of Transportation

Visitor center

Visitors to this area need maps, brochures and sometimes permits before proceeding into an area without cell service, restroom facilities, gas stations, food, or water. To catch visitors before they end up in this challenging situation, Mount Rainier National Park plans to pilot a visitor contact center on property they own in the Town of Wilkeson in collaboration with partners. Wilkeson, the last location for reliable cell service in the corridor, is also the location of the last restaurants and a gas station before the road dead ends at the National Park. If the Park determines through a pilot that there is adequate need, they will evaluate a permanent visitor center in Wilkeson through a formal planning process.

Action	Lead Organization	Partners
R-2-10 Pilot a temporary visitor contact station in Wilkeson (see action P-2-7).	National Park Service – Mount Rainier National Park	Friends of Carbon Canyon, ForeverGreen Trails, Pierce County, Foothills Rails to Trails Coalition, Town of Wilkeson
R-2-11 Evaluate establishing a permanent inter-agency visitor contact station in Wilkeson.	National Park Service – Mount Rainier National Park	Town of Wilkeson, US Forest Service, Pierce County,

Restrooms and parking

The only public restrooms in the corridor are in the Town of Wilkeson, and vault toilets just inside the Carbon River entrance to Mount Rainier National Park. Existing parking lots are inadequate and do not provide clear information about the key interest areas a visitor can access from their locations. To enhance the visitor experience and to provide more visitor services and information, the following actions have been planned:

Action	Lead Organization	Partners
R-2-12 Expand existing parking, add wayside signs and benches, and rebuild the arch at the Carbon River entrance to Mount Rainier National Park.	National Park Service – Mount Rainier National Park	TBD

R-2-13 Expand the existing parking lot in Carbonado to include a restroom and informational signage.	Town of Carbonado	Pierce County, Foothills Rails to Trails Coalition
R-2-14 Expand parking at Tolmie Creek.	US Forest Service	National Park Service – Mount Rainier National Park

[Graphic for this section: Small call-out box:

In order to move actions for this topic forward, the following will be needed:

- Coordination between agencies to improve road maintenance in the corridor.
- Collaborative partnership to study signage needs leading to and through the corridor.
- Funding for revisions to signage in the area.
- Coordinated approach to sign installation between agencies responsible for signage.
- A partnership agreement between Pierce County Parks and the Town of Carbonado regarding parking lot and restroom needs.
- Visitation studies and visitor surveys at the Fairfax and Tolmie Creek locations to determine what the needs are at those locations.
- Funding for additional parking lots, restrooms, and signage.]