

“Heart of the Cascades” Protection Opportunity – Barber Springs Ridge / Hudson Creek Hill

This request is on behalf of an informal group of approximately 50 recreationists who have a very long hunting and outdoor recreation history in the Wenas, Manastash and Bald Mountain areas of the Cascade east slopes. First, we would like to formally convey our sincere appreciation to the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation (RMEF), The Nature Conservancy (TNC), and the numerous other involved agencies and organizations for the landmark work you have been doing through the “Heart of the Cascades” project. The extensive lands you have been instrumental in protecting from fragmentation and development in the Tieton and Rock Creek/Bald Mountain areas will help ensure the long-term health of our precious wildlife resources, and sustain our hunting and outdoor recreation legacy. And we sincerely hope that the current State and Federal budget challenges do not interfere with completing your current efforts at Phase III of this extremely worthwhile and timely program.

Besides conveying our sincere appreciation and thanks for your work, we also wanted to make sure you were aware of another very-closely-related protection need in the same vicinity. The Barber Springs Ridge / Hudson Creek area (generally the north half of T17N R16E) lies immediately east of the Phase II “Heart of the Cascades” project (see Map A). This area is sandwiched between the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (DFW) LT Murray Wildlife Area to the north and east, and the Wenas and Oak Creek Wildlife Areas to the south. The area is mostly in Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) ownership, following the 2007 Central Cascades Exchange (which you helped expedite) that saw many of the former Boise Cascade timberlands in the area come into public ownership. As such, the Barber Springs Ridge / Hudson Creek area now forms the westernmost portion of an approximately 18,000 acre block of DNR ownership. Unfortunately, there are 3 sections of intermingled private ownership within this large, contiguous block of public land – Sections 5, 7 and 9 (T17N R16E). The east half of Section 9 has been owned by 13 separate, small private cabin owners for a long time, and has not posed any major threats to public resources or to public access to the area. The remaining 2 ½ sections (5, 7 and west ½ of 9) is owned by a small private company, NJK Timber Company, LLC, out of Spokane Washington. NJK Timber was formed in December of 2006, and acquired these 2 ½ sections in January of 2007. The Kittitas County assessed market value of these 2 ½ sections at the time of acquisition totaled \$33,250. While their company name would imply a timber-orientation, there is no evidence of such an objective. Over their 6 year tenure, they have performed no timber management or harvest activity on any of their lands, and have not applied for any forestry permits under the State Forest Practices Act.

To assist in wildlife management, protect roads in the area during the spring thaw, and to promote consistency in public road use across agencies, the DNR has coordinated with DFW and included this entire area in the LT Murray Cooperative Road Management Area, which is a Green-Dot road management area that includes the LT Murray, Wenas and Oak Creek Wildlife Areas, as well the extensive DNR holdings. Roads open to (seasonal) public vehicular use have been designated and “green-dotted” throughout most of this Cooperative Road Management Area. Unfortunately, NJK Timber has refused to allow any roads passing through

their ownership to be green-dotted, in spite of these same roads having been used extensively by the public for at least 75 years prior to their tenure. And DNR has concluded that all 'traditional' access routes through this area, and even most all practical 'alternative' routes, pass through at least a small part of NJK ownership. As such, at this point, no roads in the Barber Springs Ridge / Hudson Creek area have been 'green-dotted' and opened to public vehicular use. So there are nearly 7,000 acres of publicly owned lands in this area that have no legal public road access (see Map B).

When many of the former Boise Cascade lands in this area were acquired by the DNR in the 2007 Central Cascades Exchange, the public's widely-quoted expectation (and the stated expectation of RMEF also) was that by transferring these lands to public ownership, they would be protected from the threat of development, and the public recreational access to these lands would be preserved. So it has come as a huge surprise to learn that nearly 7,000 acres of DNR lands would no longer have any legal public vehicular access, as a result of the Green-Dot area designation and the refusal of NJK Timber to allow the continued public use of any roads crossing their lands.

For over 75 years, the 'traditional' access route for anyone traveling from the Seattle metropolitan area, or from Ellensburg/Wenatchee and points east, and wanting to go to the Barber Springs area, or on through to the Rock Creek/Bald Mountain and extensive Forest Service ownership to the west, would take the Manastash Road west out of Ellensburg, then take the Barber Springs Road to/through the area (see Map C). However, with this route (and most every practical alternative) passing through Sections 5 and/or 7 of NJK Timber ownership, this route is no longer [legally] open for public use. As such, recreationists are now forced to travel from Ellensburg, over I-82 through Yakima, up US12 through Naches, up Hwy 410 to the Bald Mtn Road (USFS 1701), and up 1701 through Rock Creek. This transforms a 25 mile, 55 minute trip over the traditional route from Ellensburg into an 85 mile, almost 2 hour trip!

We have been working with DNR and other groups to try to identify any alternative routes to/through this area which avoid NJK ownership. Most all practical alternatives identified thus far would require capital road upgrades and relocations, and there reportedly are no funds available within the DNR budget to cover these (these are School Trust lands).

Clearly, the optimal solution would be to designate the 'traditional' Barber Springs Road route as a green-dot road, if NJK Timber's objections could somehow be resolved. We have been told that NJK has their lands 'on-the-market' now. These lands would clearly be very desirable for private cabins and "view" recreation sites (see attached photos). If there were a way to acquire at least some portions of Sections 5 and 7, this could solve the public access problem, re-opening almost 7,000 acres of publicly-owned lands to public vehicular access, and restoring the much-more-efficient traditional access route from Ellensburg to the USFS lands on Bald Mountain and Rock Creek, and on up to the Cascade crest. Acquisition of these two sections would also block up the DNR ownership, eliminating most of the challenging intermingled private ownership from this large contiguous block of Trust timberlands.

If you have not already done so, we would strongly encourage you to investigate whether there is any opportunity to acquire at least portions of these two critical sections to restore public

(vehicular) access to and through the almost 7,000 acres of public lands in the Barber Springs Ridge / Hudson Creek area.

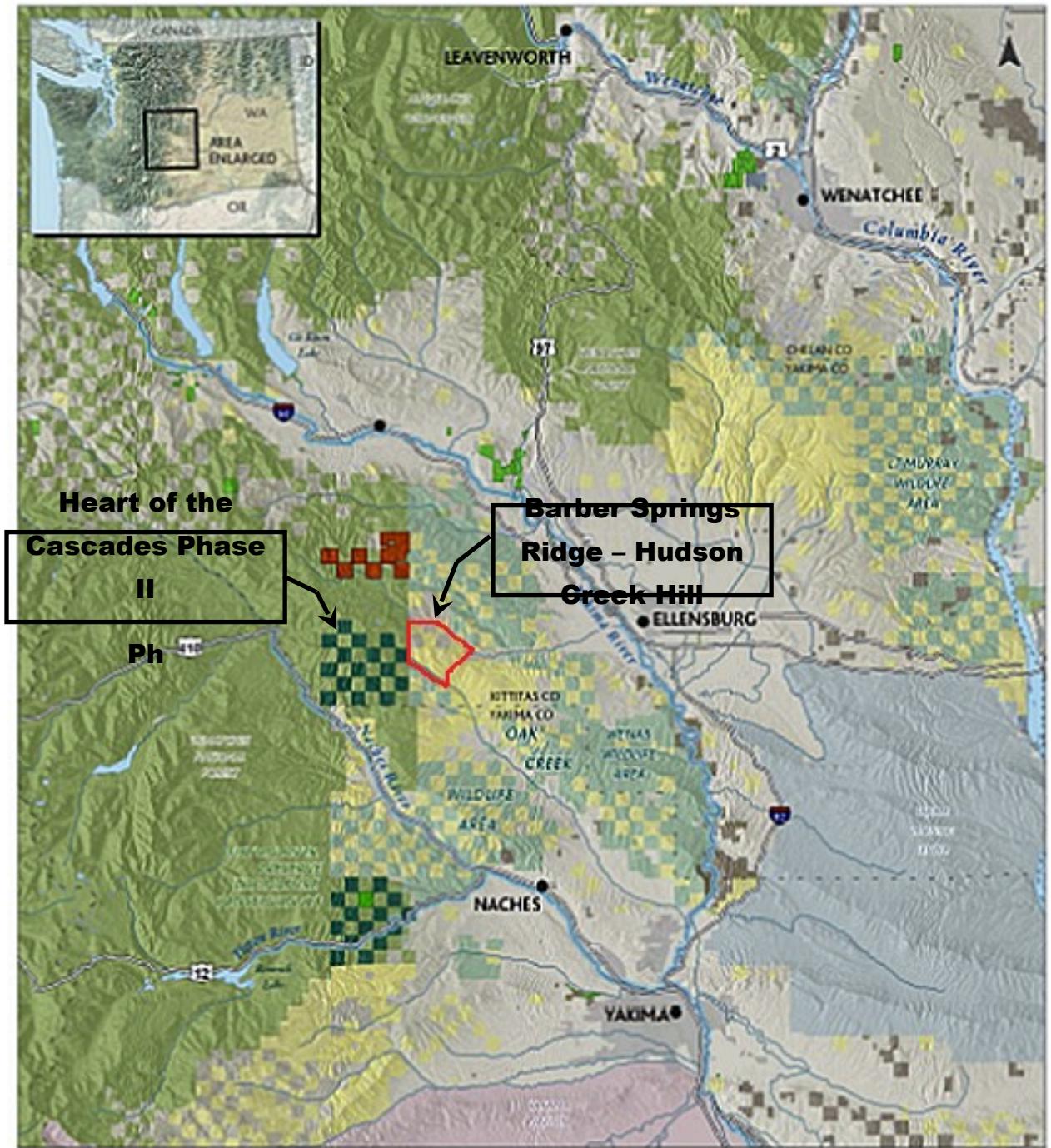
If acquisition of these two sections appears unlikely, is there any source of grant funding available through your organizations or elsewhere to fund the necessary capital road upgrade/relocation projects that would be required to open up an “alternative” public access route through this area? The DNR Southeast Region has estimated that two road segments would require upgrade/relocation. Their rough cost estimates for these two projects are \$28,000 and \$35,000 respectively. In addition, they have estimated on-going road maintenance costs for these two segments, if re-opened to the public, would average \$2,000 per year. And they indicated they have no funds for this maintenance work, so maintenance funding would also have to be secured. This “alternative” route is clearly much less desirable than the “traditional” Barber Springs Road route, but if the NJK sections 5 & 7 “closure” issue cannot be resolved, at least this “alternative” route would provide some level of public access to a portion of these public lands. If you’d like more information on this “alternate” access option, let me know, and I can provide more detail. Or you can contact Todd Welker, DNR SE Region Manager at todd.welker@dnr.wa.gov.

Thank you very much for your careful consideration of this opportunity, and for the legacy you have made possible through your past work. If you have any questions on this opportunity that we may be able to address, please let us know. And if you have any advice for us as to how we should best proceed with this opportunity, we’d really appreciate that advice also.

Sincerely,

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Cusick, WA 99119

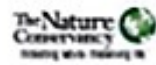
**Map A – Heart of the Cascades & Barber
Springs / Hudson Creek**



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FUTURE PLANNED ACQUISITION

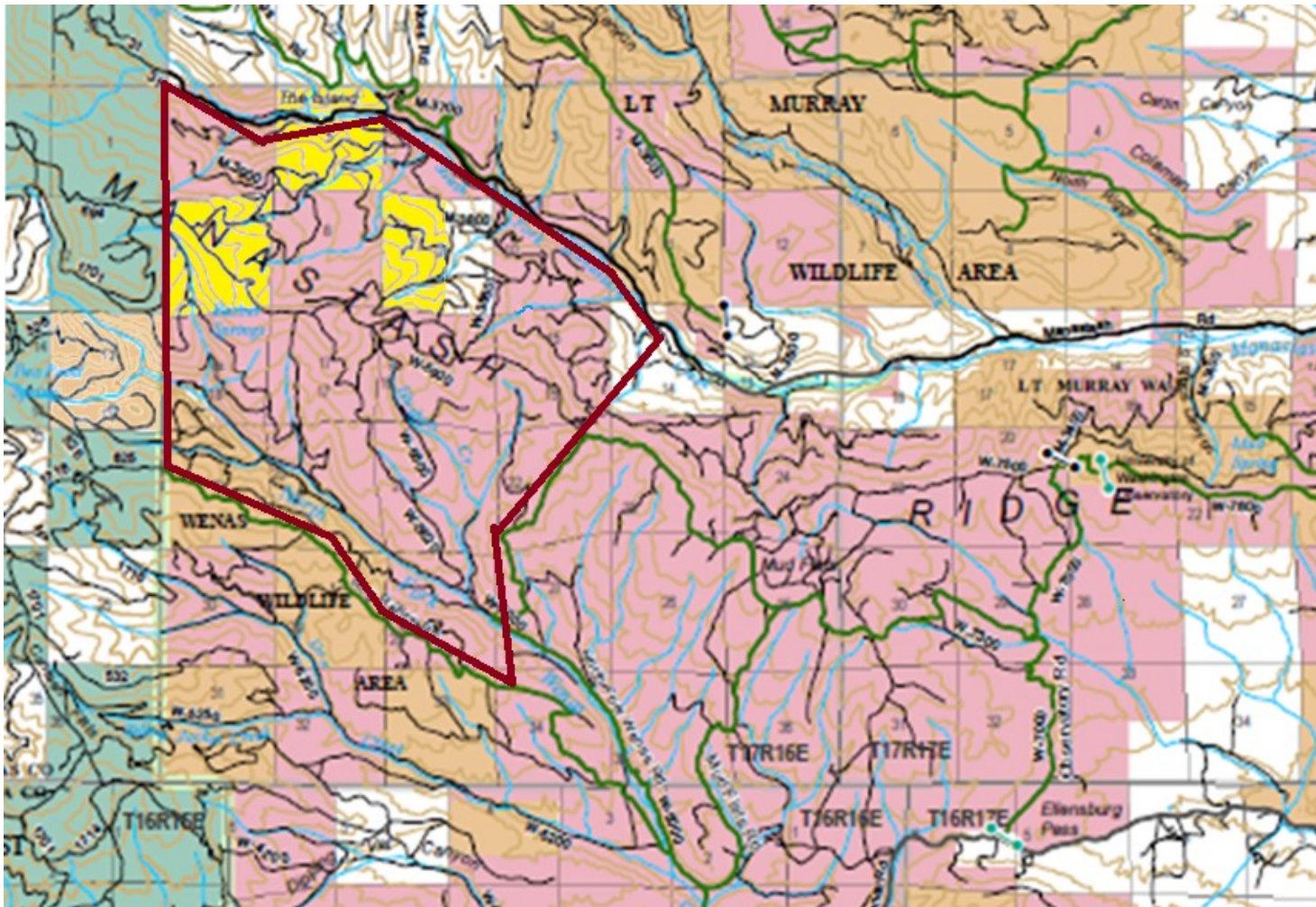
PRESENT RESTORATION PROJECTS (WASHINGTON DEPT. OF FISH AND WILDLIFE)



May 2012
 The Nature Conservancy
 Washington Chapter
 4001 1st Avenue
 Seattle, WA 98101
 info@nature.org

- National Forest (USFS)
- Private Conservation
- WA Department of Fish and Wildlife
- WA Department of Natural Resources
- Department of Defense
- Bureau of Land Management
- Tribal Land

Map B: Barber Springs Ridge / Hudson Creek Hill Green-Dot Closure Area



Legend: Barber Springs/Hudson Creek Green-Dot Closure Area

DNR

WDFW

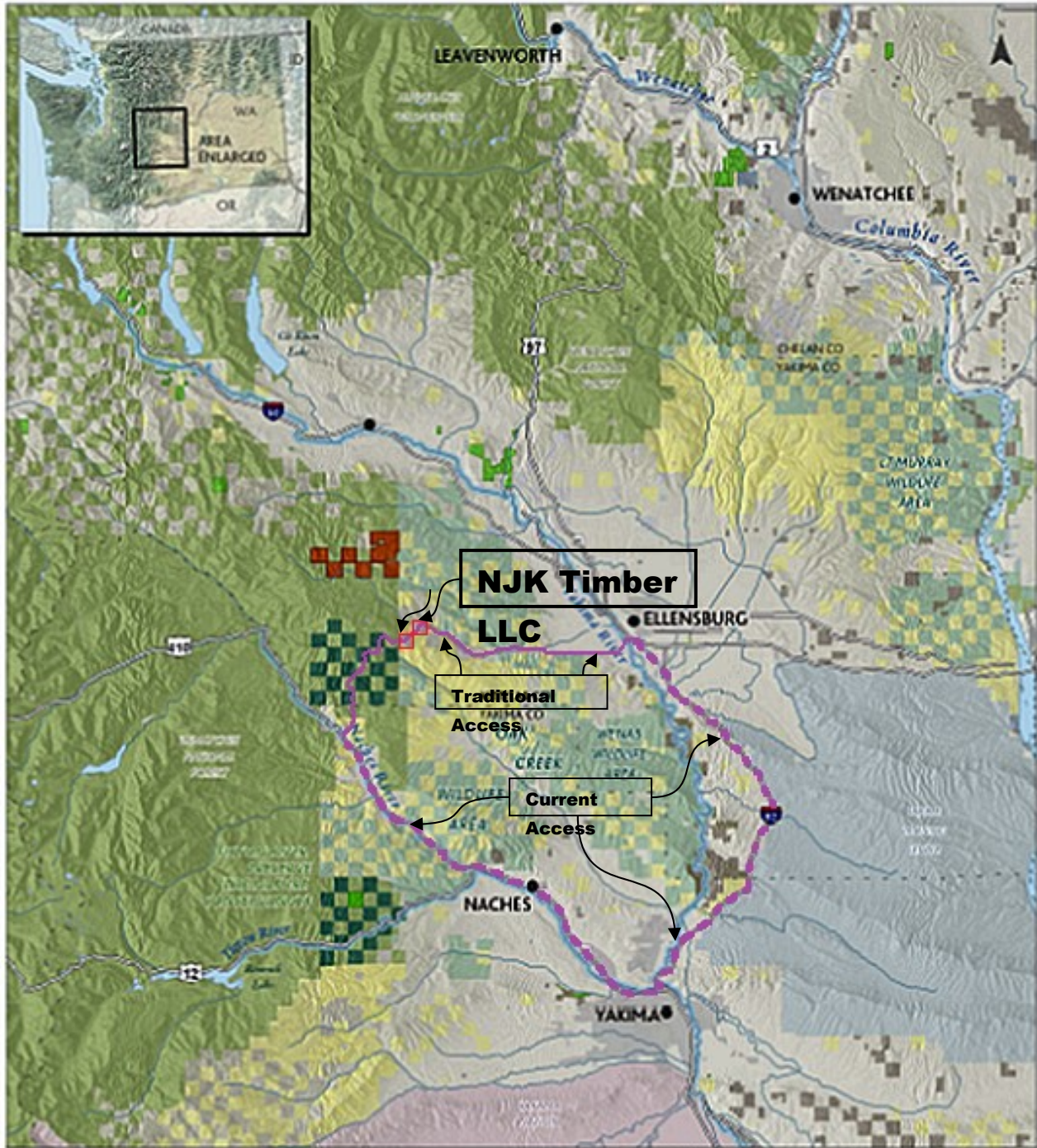
USFS

NJK Timb

Other Private

Map C – Barber Springs Ridge

Heart of the Cascades: Present and Future Access Routes



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- FUTURE PLANNED ACQUISITION
- PRESENT RESTORATION PROJECTS (WASHINGTON DEPT. OF FISH AND WILDLIFE)



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Photos of NJK Timber Company LLC Ownership



**Barber Springs Ridge (Section 7) looking NW
7) looking SE**



Top of Barber Springs Ridge (Section



**Stewarts viewed from Barber Springs Ridge (Section 7) looking N
from Section 5**

Manastash Canyon as viewed