

# 2022 Green Dot Public Comment Responses

From Washington departments of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) and Natural Resources (DNR)

Thank you to those who provided public comment on the proposed changes to the Green Dot Road Management System. We are hopeful that in 2023, we can host a in person meeting to share updates, answer questions, and get comment on road management.

## WDFW Responses

### **STEMILT AREA**

Overall, there was support for the seasonal gate closures to protect roads from damage in the spring when they are wet. Gates will only be closed at the end of the winter rec season to restrict wheeled vehicles from accessing the roads until they dry out. The groomed routes will still be open for snowmobile and tracked UTV/ATV in coordination with the State Parks Winter Recreation Program.

### **BARBER SPRINGS**

Overall, there was support for adding this road network to the Green Dot System. We do want to clarify that this was never a “public road” or right of way for public use. It was a road on a mix of private and DNR managed lands, while it had high levels of public use it was never authorized by the landowners. It is now a legal route for motorized access to adjacent US Forest Service lands.

### **LOWER BUFFALO ROAD**

Overall, there was support for permanently adding this road to the Green Dot System. The road will be upgraded, and a parking area will be added at the Skyline Trailhead.

### **GREEN DOT EDUCATION**

WDFW will be hiring a Green Dot/Motorized Rec education position that will be patrolling Green Dot roads and working with WDFW Police to educate and enforce Green Dot rules. This will help address ongoing issues in the area and provide a consistent WDFW presence to answer questions, provide education on rules, and address violations in a proactive manner.

## DNR Responses

### **MID-ELEVATION GATES**

Installing additional gates in the Ahtanum State Forest will allow the land managers to open lower elevations sooner than we have been able to in recent years. Allowing earlier access to the lower elevations of the Ahtanum State Forest increases access for recreation and hunting opportunities to more than what was previously available at that time. The intent of these gates is to give more access to wheeled vehicles earlier in the season and allow winter recreation users more time at higher elevations when the conditions are desirable. Comments received reflected this balance of user group needs and the Agency feels like this is a user driven compromise.

### **SEASONAL CLOSURE CONSISTENCY**

The term “seasonal closure” in the Green Dot Road System has come to be defined as Dec. 10 to May 1 on DNR-managed lands in Yakima County. These dates allow for winter recreation (in areas designated for that) as well as areas of refuge for wintering animals and protection of the road systems from

damage while the road prism is soft. Enacting a standardized seasonal closure will allow users to know definitively when gates will be open and closed every season and not have to play a guessing game. The land in the Ahtanum is still accessible during seasonal closures, just not by wheeled motorized vehicles.

### **TRACKED UTVs**

DNR plans to work together with State Parks Winter Recreation Program and the Snowmobile Advisory Committee to best determine how to control wheeled access to groomed snowmobile routes while also allowing Tracked UTV/ATV's. This is a relatively new recreational use that the Parks Winter Recreation Program is promoting on DNR lands and more discussion and thought needs to go into how best to manage this use. The agency would like to hear more about how to accomplish this balance in a creative way.

### **ROAD MAINTENANCE**

Thanks to the advocacy of WA Trails Association and many other recreation user groups, the DNR was awarded funds to catch up on the maintenance backlog tied to recreation opportunities. Some of these funds will go towards improving drainage and surfacing on green dot roads in the Ahtanum and Naneum Ridge State Forests.

### **LAW ENFORCEMENT AVAILABILITY**

Recently, the region had the opportunity to develop a new Education & Enforcement Warden position aimed at providing an educational presence in the Ahtanum State Forest, as well as the ability to write tickets when necessary. The pilot project was only a matter of months but showed great success. Users reported to us they were happy to see a consistent presence on the landscape from someone who could answer questions or provide resources for other information. At the end of that pilot, it was clear to the region that this position needed to be a full-time addition. In March 2022, the region hired a full time Education & Enforcement Warden to help continue the good work our part time warden accomplished during the pilot period. This position will supplement the Natural Resource Police Officer assigned to the south half of Southeast Region to provide a more consistent presence in Yakima County. The Agency also relies on users and clubs to educate each other on responsible recreation and rules governing the privileges of outdoor recreation on public lands.

### **HATTON ROAD**

The removal of a portion of Hatton Road over private property within the Green Dot Road Management System is an administrative update that was overlooked in 2018 when no private landowner agreement was established. Private landowners' participation in the Green Dot program is entirely voluntary. DNR and WDFW attempted to establish Cooperative Road Management Agreements with each private landowner within the Green Dot Road Management System where a Green Dot Road crossed their private property. The Departments were not able to obtain agreements from the landowners asserting their private property rights, meaning we cannot offer those portions of the roads to be used by the public. The Green Dot posts have been removed in this location since the agreement was not established. The map will now match what is on the ground.

### **R5081 REMOVAL**

Removal of the R5081 road from the map is an administrative update. The map will now match what is on the ground. There are no open roads off the R5081 and it did not provide a loop opportunity. The area is still open for non-motorized recreational use.