

Conservation Group Raises Concerns with Icicle Watershed Strategy

Proposed alternatives for increased use of wilderness water at odds with law

June 1, 2018

Contact

Karl Forsgaard, Past President of ALPS

karlforsgaard@comcast.net 206-330-8966

Rick McGuire, Vice President of ALPS

rckmcguire@gmail.com 206-363-6954

Background:

Chelan County and the State Department of Ecology's Office of Columbia River announced the release of the Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (DPEIS) for the Icicle Creek Watershed Water Resources Management Strategy (Icicle Strategy) on May 31, 2018. The release of the DPEIS marks the start of a 60-day public comment period. The Icicle Work Group seeks to develop a water resource management strategy and implement a collection of projects in the Icicle Creek Watershed in Chelan County.

Alpine Lakes Protection Society (ALPS) is concerned that a suite of projects proposed in the Icicle DPEIS relies too heavily on removing more water than ever before from wilderness lakes in the popular Enchantment Basin and the greater Alpine Lakes Wilderness as a key solution for addressing its needs.

ALPS has provided ongoing constructive input into the Icicle Work Group process, repeatedly voicing our concern about the activities proposed within the Alpine Lakes Wilderness and the potential conflicts with federal law, including the Wilderness Act. We also believe the alternatives have received insufficient analysis on the validity and extent of water rights specific to the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. Despite our repeated concerns, the Icicle Work Group has chosen to present proposals in the DPEIS that are inconsistent with bedrock environmental laws and at odds with the work group's own "guiding principles." Project proposals that violate those principles should not be included in the final PEIS.

Moving forward, ALPS plans to review and analyze the DPEIS and will submit comment as part of the public process. This includes a review of alternatives for improvements and increased storage at old dams in the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. For several years, a coalition of more than 40 conservation and recreation organizations has co-signed comment letters submitted by ALPS to the Icicle Work Group, including scoping comments two years ago for the DPEIS. Separately, ALPS is monitoring current emergency efforts to stabilize the Eightmile Lake dam to ensure the stabilization activities address current safety concerns and not expanded water capacity.

ALPS is confident we do not need to trade wilderness values for water in the Alpine Lake Wilderness. We believe it is possible to accomplish instream flow targets, respect appropriate water rights, and comply with federal law. Water is an increasingly important resource in eastern Washington. Creative solutions and constructive relationships are necessary to be successful and meet instream needs, as well as the changing needs of communities in the Wenatchee Valley.

The Alpine Lakes and its Enchantments is one of the nation's more popular wilderness destinations and attracts people from around the world. With 615 miles of trail (including one of the better sections of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail), world-class climbing, hiking and backpacking, and 400,000 acres of spectacular mountain scenery and lakes, the area is both beloved by recreationists and an important contributor to the regional recreation economy.

Broad citizen support helped create the Alpine Lakes Wilderness more than 40 years ago and there remains a deep passion for protecting this vital Northwest gem. The Icicle Work Group's final plans for the Icicle watershed need to reflect this passion and adherence to the law.

ALPS encourages those who love the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, and appreciate its conservation, recreation and economic benefits, to make their voices heard during the public comment period. Broad citizen engagement helped create the Alpine Lakes Wilderness and is still needed to continue to protect its essential values.

Chelan County and Ecology convened the Icicle Work Group in December 2012 to come up with a plan to address various water supply and other resource issues. Included among the issues is obtaining more water for the City of Leavenworth and other municipalities in the Wenatchee Valley. The Icicle Work Group calls its plan the "Icicle Strategy" and proposes to manipulate water levels at eight lakes in the Alpine Lakes Wilderness, including Eightmile Lake.

A copy of the DPEIS of the Icicle Creek Watershed Water Resource and Management Strategy and information on how to comment is located on the Chelan County web site: <http://www.co.chelan.wa.us/natural-resources/pages/environmental-review>. Public comment on the plan and proposed actions will be taken until July 30. Comments will also be accepted at a public hearing at the Leavenworth Festhalle, 1001 Front Street, Leavenworth, Washington on June 27, from 4 to 8 p.m. ALPS also anticipates Chelan County convening an informational meeting on the DPEIS in Seattle on or about June 25.