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Court orders halt to Trump administration plan to build road in the middle of federally-protected Stehekin River

In wake of court-ordered Temporary Restraining Order, conservation group urges federal authorities to abandon ‘this ill-conceived, wasteful, destructive boondoggle.’

[Read the Temporary Restraining Order, issued Sept. 28, here](#)

[Read the original lawsuit, filed Sept. 15, here](#)

A US District Court on Monday afternoon ordered federal officials and contractors to immediately halt work on building a road in the middle of the Stehekin River in the North Cascades National Park Complex in Washington State.

The [North Cascades Conservation Council](#) (NCCC) had sued the National Park Service and the Trump administration, seeking to protect the Stehekin River from federal plans that would permanently damage the river, destroy habitat and aquatic life, and put downstream homeowners at risk.

“The National Park Service's rushed and flawed plan to construct a temporary road in the active channel of the Stehekin River is unlawful. We are pleased that the federal court halted the project and ordered the immediate withdrawal or suspension of any approval or permit for the project,” said Zak Griefen of Bricklin & Newman, LLP, counsel for plaintiff North Cascades Conservation Council.

Judge John H. Chun of the US District Court of Western Washington issued his Temporary Restraining Order against the federal government on Monday afternoon. Judge Chun barred the government from “Any construction or building activity within the channel migration zone of the Stehekin River” and ordered the National Park Service to withdraw or suspend work permits for the project.

NCCC President Phil Fenner hailed Monday's ruling as "a victory for common sense and everyone who cares about our national parklands, and a repudiation of this ill-conceived, wasteful, destructive boondoggle."

Last month the National Park Service (NPS), a part of the US Department of Interior, announced it had issued a permit to Chelan County to build a road in the middle of the Stehekin River. The Park Service said construction crews would use sheet-piling, artificial barriers, and dredging to rechannel the river and build a 350-foot part of Company Creek Road that was washed out in last December's floods. The NPS planned to have this work done in the middle of Stehekin's fall kokanee salmon spawning season, at a cost of about \$1.5 million in state and county dollars. Construction work began in the river channel late last week, but Monday's Temporary Restraining Order put an immediate halt to the work.

The entire Stehekin River lies within federally protected land - the North Cascades National Park Service Complex. As the NCCC's lawsuit notes, the federal government is mandated by law "to conserve the scenery, natural and historic objects, and wild life . . . in such manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations."

In advancing its road-in-the-river plans, the NPS rejected appeals from Stehekin property owners and others to rebuild the road on land adjacent to the planned construction site in an existing makeshift roadbed.

In the wake of Monday's ruling, Fenner repeated the NCCC's call to the Park Service to go back to its earlier road plans, which did not involve encroachment in the river.

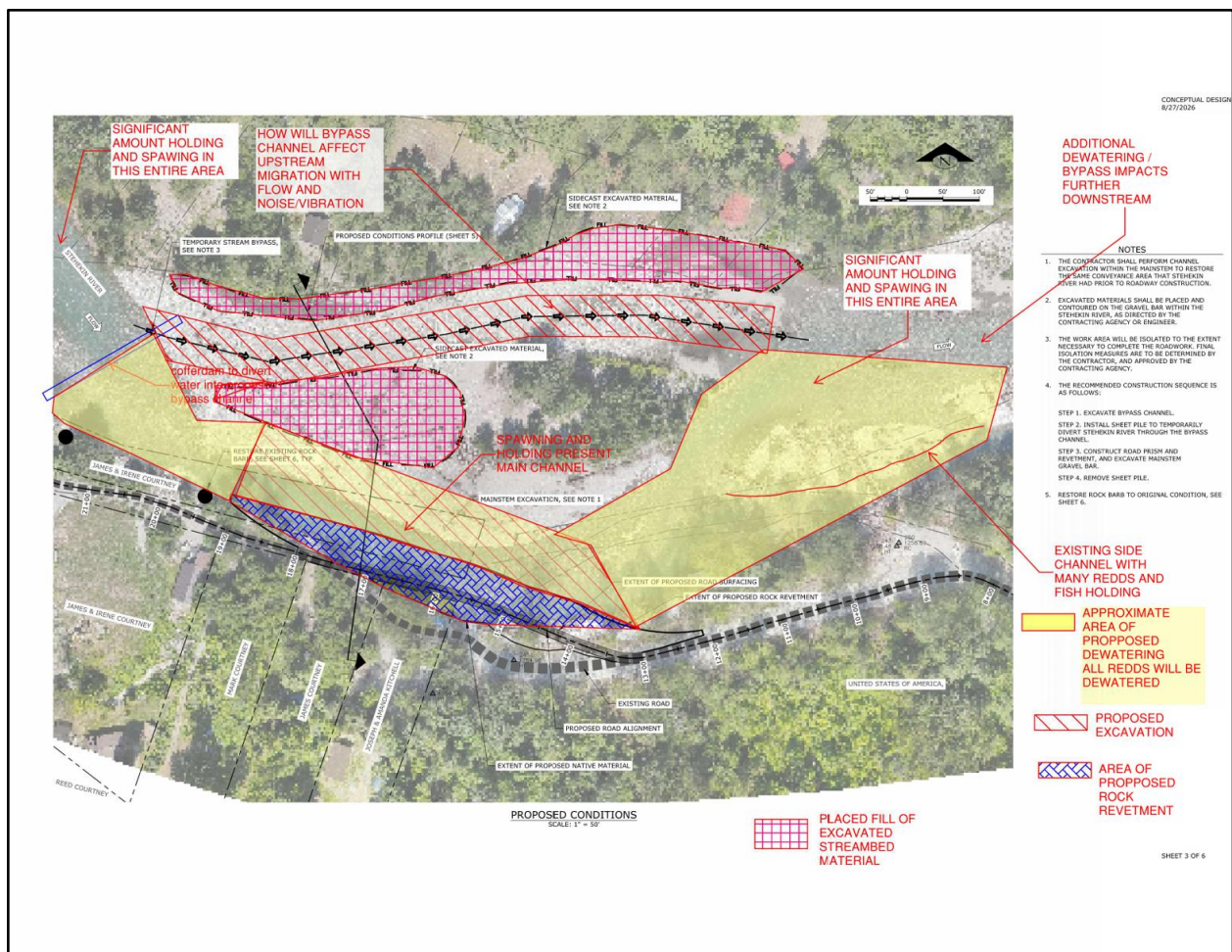
"The land-side option in the existing makeshift roadbed is sensible, less expensive, and will not damage the river," he noted.

Fenner noted that NCCC includes members whose Stehekin homes were rendered inaccessible by December's floods. "Our members and many other Stehekin property owners want regular access to their homes, but they do not want this destructive road-in-the-river," Fenner said.

Fenner continued: "The NCCC supports rebuilding Company Creek Road so that all residents within the Stehekin Valley are safe and have access to their homes. For weeks after last December's flooding - which harmed residents, damaged homes, and even endangered the lives of some - the National Park Service shamefully did nothing to address the issue. They were silent. Now, fully nine months later, the federal government planned to rush in and build a road in the river that would have caused irreparable harm to its ecosystem and the valley. Moreover, it would have further endangered downstream residents who would be at heightened risk of future flooding because of the scale of dredging and re-channeling that the NPS proposed to do."



The portion of the Stehekin River that the federal government wanted to “dewater,” divert, and build a road in. Looking upriver; McGregor Mountain is in the background. Picture courtesy of NCCC; reproduction with credit is fine.



NPS construction documents showing the extensive planned alteration of the Stehekin River. Notes in red were added by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife staff to underscore their concerns about harm to fish and habitat. Image courtesy of NCCC.