

Reiter Trails Closure, Rehab, Rebuilding and Reopening ~ What really happened? ~

Initially, the DNR planned to close Reiter for about 6 months, from Fall 2009 to Spring 2010. The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) worked with the DNR, and together they came up with a plan to rehabilitate Reiter Foothills Forest. At the conclusion of the planning period, the DNR announced Reiter would remain closed until a point in time when the environment was rehabilitated and sustainable off-road trails were established; unfortunately, that closure would last years rather than months.

The agencies published a rehabilitation plan and provided a timeframe for public input via surveys and public meetings. The response from the off-road community was immense, but did not change the state of the closure, nor the bulk of the rehabilitation plan. Smaller groups of off-road users then began meeting with the DNR outlining the needs of motorcyclists, ATVs and 4WD groups, some of which made it into the final plan.

The new boundaries for Reiter Trails offroad use area were determined using multiple agencies and factors. The DNR had input from officials from the town of Index, since the water runoff from Reiter Foothills drained directly into their water reservoirs. Wallace Falls State Park had its boundary directly on the other side of Wallace Falls, so Washington State Parks and Recreation was involved in setting boundaries. And the EPA was heavily involved, due to the illegal garbage dumping that had occurred for decades, damage to salmon spawning streams and to protect the old growth forest in the upper regions of Reiter.

A “buffer zone” from Wallace Falls to about the May Creek area was marked off-limits to off-road recreation in order to avoid noise-pollution at Wallace Falls State Park. From the first gravel pit area on Reiter Road all the way up to Deer Flats Road was marked off-limits to off-road recreation because of illegal dumping and to protect further damage to salmon spawning streams. The south-southeast facing downhill slopes that ran towards the town of Index were marked off limits to off-road recreation to preserve the quality of the water runoff. A majority of the upper elevation areas within Reiter were marked off-limits to off-road recreation to protect the old growth forest. And lastly, there were to be no water crossings, in hopes to prevent as much sediment runoff as possible that could potentially harm salmon spawning areas. The resulting boundaries left ~500 acres designated for off-road recreation, located at the heart of Deer Flats.

The DNR recognized the large amount of work required to reopen Reiter in a timely manner and decided to acquire further resources from other agencies: particularly, the Washington Conservation Corps (WCC). The DNR hired a Recreation Specialist to directly oversee the Reiter Foothills Forest project and hired a Landscape Architect to design the off-road trails—per the rules set in place by the DNR and EPA—and the WCC began work at Reiter in 2011 or 2012.

In the summer of 2013, trails were being built by the DNR and WCC with very little input from the off-road community. The Landscape Architect would take a short walk through a section of forest with WCC, then go back to her desk and design the trails on the computer. In compliance with the design, WCC trail crews had to build berms to a specified angle based on the radius of a turn and were not allowed to deviate from the Landscape Architect's trail plans. If the crew encountered an immovable obstacle, work was halted, the Landscape Architect would get called back out to reassess and redesign the trail. This proved to be a huge waste of time and effort, and therefore, funds. We needed to adjust this process to preserve funding and build trails faster, or the DNR's goals were not going to be met which risked the entire project getting shut down.

In 2014, NMA member Jennifer Briggs was promoted to Trail Crew Supervisor for the WCC at Reiter. Prior to beginning work that summer, she met with the new Recreation Manager and the Recreation Specialist and they cooperatively came up with a much more successful trail planning method. The Recreation Specialist and Briggs would walk and flag potential trail routes using their collective knowledge of what was and was not allowed. Once a trail was flagged from beginning to end, Briggs would write up a quick summary on how the trail would be built, the Landscape Architect would walk the proposed route, make necessary alterations to the plan, and then WCC could proceed with construction. Once the trail was complete, the Landscape Architect would return and either approve the trail or note any needed adjustments. This process would repeat until the trail was fully approved. WCC was mapping out trails well in advance and the trail building process was never interrupted. As a result, total trail miles built in the summer of 2014 was approximately double the amount built the previous summer!

Briggs' goal for the 2015 trail building season was to stop surfacing the trails with crushed rock. The Landscape Architect argued that gravel would "lock" into place once it was compacted, creating a stable surface for off-road recreation. Jennifer brought her dirt bike out to Reiter and did a demo ride on gravel proving that this was incorrect. This information coupled with the high cost of hauling gravel was used to justify the switch to the use of pit run as fill. In 2015 all new trails were covered in a layer of pit run; once again, more trail miles were built in the 2015 season than previous years.

In the summer of 2015, Reiter officially opened up to the public on weekends only (to allow WCC trail crew to keep working full time on building trails). The struggle to keep off-road users on the designated trails that first summer was immense, and once again, Reiter was under threat to close back down. The DNR locked the gates closed for a couple weekends that summer, while WCC trail crews worked on blocking re-routes and rehabilitating damage. Word about this issue spread throughout the off-road community and the use of non-sanctioned routes was reduced significantly.

Since the 2015 reopening, expansion of the singletrack and ATV trail system has continued, primarily to the east of Deer Flats, while 4WD trails are concentrated immediately east of Reiter Road.