

FAQs - Cellular Service at Paradise Mount Rainier National Park

Q: When will cellular service be available?

A: The timeframe for the installation of the wireless communication facility and the activation of the service is unknown at this time.

Q: Which cellular service companies will provide service?

A: The National Park Service (NPS) has approved Verizon Wireless and T-Mobile right-of-way permit applications to co-locate a limited range wireless communication facility at Paradise. AT&T has submitted an application and may be issued a right-of-way permit pending final review and approval of their proposal.

Q: How far will the cellular service extend?

A: The cellular service will be strongest in the Paradise developed area. Weaker signals will extend beyond Paradise toward the east/northeast, and west/southwest. The Environmental Assessment contains maps, and the carrier-provided maps are available on the project website at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/ParadiseCellular>

Q: Why is the NPS approving this initiative?

A: The National Park Service is approving cellular service at Paradise to protect visitor and employee safety, and to improve communications in the park's largest developed area, visited by nearly one million visitors each year. The NPS determined that the action will not cause conflict with the park's mission, and that the provision of cellular service at Paradise will benefit the public by improving communication between visitors, and between the NPS and the public.

Q: What comments did the park receive from people opposed to cellular service at Paradise?

A: Comments that the park received opposed to cellular service at Paradise emphasized the protection of national parks and wilderness areas from the visual impacts of a cell tower and wireless signals. Other comments focused on concerns over visitor use of cell phones negatively impacting other visitors' park experiences of solitude within and outside of nearby designated wilderness.

Q: What comments did the park receive from those in favor of cellular service?

A: Comments in favor emphasized visitor and employee safety, emergency response, and the benefits of improved communication for park visitors. This includes park visitors receiving timely information and education materials; visitors connecting and coordinating with other party members; visitors making wellness checks; and the park providing timely notification of hazards and changing conditions.

Q: How many comments did the National Park Service receive from the public?

A: The NPS received 492 comments during public scoping on the alternatives prior to the publication of the EA, with a near balance between those in favor and those opposed to cellular service at Paradise. The NPS received 893 comments on the EA, with approximately 70% opposed to the service.

Q: How can there be cellular service without a cell tower?

A: The right-of-way permits the cellular service providers to install a limited range communication facility in the attic of the Jackson Visitor Center, with all equipment in the attic and antennas concealed behind new fiberglass wall panels on the gable ends of the building.

Q: Will the cellular antennas impact the viewshed or NHLD at Paradise?

A: No. The cellular equipment would be concealed within the Jackson Visitor Center, a non-historic building, would not be visible from the National Historic Landmark District (NHL), with the exception of two or three small GPS antennas mounted above the back door (one per carrier). The NPS consulted with the State Historic Preservation Officer, who agreed that there would be no adverse effect to historic resources. No tower would be constructed or authorized. The NHL and viewshed would not be impacted.

Q: Will the cellular providers pay the government rent for the space they are using in the Jackson Visitor Center?

A: The federal government will receive revenues from the right-of-way permits. The NPS will charge a rent, which will be deposited to the U.S. Treasury. The carriers will pay Mount Rainier National Park for utilities consumed by the project, which will be measured via meters attached to the park's electrical service.

Q: How might cellular service impact the Visitor Experience?

A: An increase in telecommunication capabilities will potentially affect visitor experience positively or negatively depending on individual preference. Improved cellular signals, and the potential increase in use of mobile devices in the Paradise area, may have positive and negative impacts depending on visitor expectations. Mount Rainier National Park plans to implement a public education program to address public concern related to the inconsiderate use of cell phones on trails and in shared public facilities and spaces.

Q: How might cellular service impact Wilderness Character?

A: Improved cellular service at Paradise would primarily serve the developed area and nearby paved trail system where the majority of visitors venture. Cell signals would extend into adjacent wilderness to a limited extent. Use of personal hand-held electronic devices such as GPS units, personal tracking or locator beacons (some with messaging or texting), avalanche transceivers, portable solar chargers, satellite phones, radios and satellite or cellular phones is acceptable in wilderness and not prohibited by any regulation (NPS RM-41). Opportunities to experience solitude or primitive and unconfined recreation may be diminished, depending on an individual visitor's point of view regarding the presence of cellular service.

The park is supportive of allowing coverage in the heavily used Paradise area, where high visitation, and a large number of calls for medical, law enforcement, or search and rescue assistance are initiated. While some spillover to wilderness is expected to occur, the design effectively constrains the signal because it is restricted to the attics of the JVC, and does not include a cell tower. The NPS will ask the cellular carriers to reduce their signal to the west-southwest, where the wilderness character of solitude and unconfined recreation is most expected.

Q: How would public and employee Safety and Health be affected?

A: The NPS has determined that the long-term health, safety, and information-dissemination benefits associated with enhanced communications, including the benefits to visitor and employee safety through facilitation of emergency and nonemergency reporting and response, would be improved with cellular coverage in those areas that are most intensely used, and where most accidents and visitor fatalities occur, including Paradise area proper, the trails from Paradise to Panorama Point, the Muir Snowfield, and Mazama Ridge.