National Park Service
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Mount Rainier National Park News Release

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Mount Rainier National Park Seeks Public Input for Proposed Expansion of Lahar Detection System

Ashford, WA -- Superintendent Chip Jenkins announced today that the public comment period has opened for a proposed expansion of the lahar detection system at Mount Rainier National Park. The United States Geological Survey (USGS) Cascades Volcano Observatory has proposed changes to the existing volcano monitoring system inside Mount Rainier National Park as part of a broader effort to implement an expanded lahar detection system.

Public input will be accepted during the scoping period from October 5-30, and will assist the National Park Service (NPS) in identifying concerns, potential alternatives, and suggested mitigations. To submit comments at any point during the open comment period, please visit the NPS Planning, Environment, and Public Comment website at https://parkplanning.nps.gov/moralahardetection. A virtual public meeting to provide a project overview and answer questions is scheduled for 4:30-5:30 pm on Wednesday, October 21, 2020.

"The proposed lahar detection system would help us to install a world-class, real-time monitoring network to detect the earliest signs of unrest," stated Seth Moran, Scientist-in-Charge at the USGS Cascades Volcano Observatory. Mount Rainier is an active volcano located within the national park near the growing Seattle-Tacoma metropolitan area. Lahars, or volcanic mudslides, are the primary volcanic hazard with potential to impact people living, working, or recreating within or near Mount Rainier National Park.

The USGS currently monitors Mount Rainier volcanic activity along with the Pacific Northwest Seismic Network using a network of monitoring stations consisting of 13 seismic and 6 Global Positioning System (GPS) installations located within 12 miles (20 kilometers) of the summit. The USGS proposal would expand the system to improve overall volcano monitoring and lahar detection capacity and provide more rapid notification to the immediate area and surrounding communities in the event of a volcanic event or mudflow.

The NPS has considered the USGS proposal and approved five new monitoring locations within the park's developed administrative areas that have independent utility. The remaining 12 proposed sites have the potential to affect historic properties or

wilderness character within Mount Rainier National Park. These proposed monitoring and lahar detection sites will be evaluated through an environmental assessment (EA) in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act to support public engagement and inform agency decision making regarding the USGS proposal. The EA will be available for public review and comment this winter.

“The USGS and NPS are working together to identify how to best meet monitoring and lahar detection needs while minimizing the potential for adverse effects to park resources and values at Mount Rainier National Park,” shared Superintendent Chip Jenkins. “We’d like to hear what questions and ideas people have,” he continued. “Mount Rainier National Park provides unparalleled opportunities for learning and understanding the nature of the Mount Rainier volcano. We support improved monitoring of volcanic hazards in partnership with USGS to help protect local communities while also continuing to preserve the character of the Mount Rainier Wilderness and the integrity of the park’s National Historic Landmark District.”

For more information, please visit Mount Rainier National Park’s park planning site.

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