



## Categorical Exclusion Documentation Form (CE Form)

**Project:** East Fork Quinault River Trail and Enchanted Valley Overcrowding

**PEPC Project Number:** 122416

**Description of Action (Project Description):**

Issue: In many of Olympic National Park's popular wilderness locations, overnight use is subject to an established limitation regarding the maximum number of daily permits issued. This is due to a variety of reasons to include, but not limited to, an area may be able to contain only a certain number of established camp areas based on the type of resources present; there may be sensitive natural or cultural resources within the area; or there may have been past damage to natural or cultural resources from overuse and quotas were issued to alleviate damage and allow these resources to recover naturally. The remaining park wilderness areas remain unrestricted, and some of these areas experience negative impacts to park resources, wilderness character, and visitor experience due to the frequent large number of permitted users.

These impacts include campsite overcrowding, trailhead congestion and limited parking, insufficient holding capacity for human waste in pit toilets, decreased opportunities for visitor solitude, and the expansion of current established, or the creation of new, camp areas by visitors. While bears are frequently in the Enchanted Valley area, to date there have been no issues with human-wildlife interactions and wildlife, in general, obtaining food rewards.

This project's primary focus is the loss of solitude along the East Fork Quinault River Trail and in the Enchanted Valley. Olympic National Park currently does not limit the number of overnight groups or people there, and the wilderness character, specifically opportunities for solitude, may be negatively impacted by the quantity of use that occurs.

Every person that uses the Daniel J. Evans Wilderness overnight is required to obtain a permit. Daily camper nights are tracked through the park's reservation system and indicates the total number of permitted users. Overnight use within the East Fork Quinault River Trail and in the Enchanted Valley has greatly increased in recent years. See table on page 2 of the MRA.

Daily camper nights for Enchanted Valley alone exceeded 300 people on one occasion in 2022, and twice in 2023. Camper nights in the valley, ranging between 100 and 299 people, occurred 31 times in 2022, and 34 times in 2023. This level of nightly use results in frequent overcrowding of campsites and a degradation of wilderness character. Parties are forced to camp close to, or within close sight of, numerous other campers. The crowding can be like that of a front-country campground. This contrasts wilderness values of: • "generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable" • "outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation"

Need: Although park management has been identifying many of these issues during the scoping process of a Wilderness Stewardship Plan, immediate changes may be necessary to reduce ongoing resource degradation and improve the wilderness experience in the East Fork Quinault River Trail and in the Enchanted Valley.

Preferred alternative (alternative 4 in the MRA): Establish limitations on the number of permits issued and overnight users.

o This alternative would establish a limitation dependent upon the number of permits issued or overnight users within the East Fork Quinault River Trail and Enchanted Valley, whichever was first reached. Current ONP compendium limits party size in this area to no more than twelve individuals per permit. Overcrowding at these sites could occur if the maximum number of permits were issued with 12 people in each party.

There would be a maximum of 30 permits allowed and up to 208 overnight users per night, whichever number is reached first; however, each site is limited to the below:

o Pony Bridge = 3 permits or 18 overnight users o Fire Creek = 2 permits or 12 overnight users o O'Neil = 6 permits or 36 overnight users o Pyrites = 7 permits or 42 overnight users o Enchanted Valley = 12 permits or 100 overnight users

o Reservations for the 2024 summer season open on April 15, 2024; the action would start this calendar year (2024) and could be piloted for up to 3 years, at which point it would be revisited and determined whether the number of permits needs to be adjusted. o Monitoring of the action would take place during regular and routine foot patrols of the East Fork Quinault River Trail and the Enchanted Valley. Wilderness camping occurs by park rangers and wilderness information assistants as a regular part of their job duties. Rangers patrol this area independently or as a pair, and typically for 1-2 nights each trip. Rangers do not patrol with stock, therefore there would be no overnight stock use with ranger patrol staff.

### Project Locations:

#### Location

County: Jefferson State: WA

#### Mitigation(s):

- Ensure that this project is communicated to affected staff and visitors.

**CE Citation:** 3.3.D.2 Minor changes in amounts or types of visitor use for the purpose of ensuring visitor safety or resource protection in accordance with existing regulations.

#### CE Justification:

CE 3.3.D.2 is being applied due to the proposed action of establishing new quotas for visitor use management, resource and wilderness protection.

**Decision:** I find that the action fits within the categorical exclusion above. Therefore, I am categorically excluding the described project from further NEPA analysis. No extraordinary circumstances apply.

#### Signature

Superintendent: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



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**Extraordinary Circumstances:**

| If implemented, would the proposal...   | Yes/No | Explanation  |
|---|--------|--|
| <b>A.</b> Have significant impacts on public health or safety?  | No     | While there could be safety concerns, the project does not include additional actions or components that would have any impact on public health or safety, much less a significant impact.   |
| <b>B.</b> Have significant impacts on such natural resources and unique geographic characteristics as historic or cultural resources; park, recreation, or refuge lands; wilderness areas; wild or scenic rivers; national natural landmarks; sole or principal drinking water aquifers; prime farmlands; wetlands (Executive Order 11990); floodplains (Executive Order 11988); national monuments; migratory birds; and other ecologically significant or critical areas? | No     | The park's NHPA Section 106 Coordinator has determined that no historic properties would be affected by the project. The park's NHPA Section 106 Advisor and Archeologist has determined that there are no known archeological resources in the project area. However, in the event of an inadvertent discovery, mitigation measures have been included to properly address the situation. |
| <b>C.</b> Have highly controversial environmental effects or involve unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources (NEPA section 102(2)(E))?  | No     | No highly controversial environmental effects or unresolved conflicts concerning alternative uses of available resources were identified during the IDT review. Given the context and extent of the proposed action, there should be no controversial effects or unresolved conflicts.   |
| <b>D.</b> Have highly uncertain and potentially significant environmental effects or involve unique or unknown environmental risks?   | No     | No highly uncertain/potentially significant environmental effects or risks were identified during the IDT review. Similar projects to adjust use limits in high use areas have been implemented within the park and the effects are well understood.   |
| <b>E.</b> Establish a precedent for future action or represent a decision in principle about future actions with potentially significant environmental effects?   | No     | This project is intended to modify use in a overcrowded wilderness area and does not set a precedent for future actions with potentially significant environmental effects.  |
| <b>F.</b> Have a direct relationship to other actions with individually insignificant, but cumulatively significant, environmental effects?   | No     | This project would not result in cumulatively significant environmental effects as the impacts of the proposed actions would all be well-below the impact threshold that would require the project to be conducted as an EA.   |
| <b>G.</b> Have significant impacts on properties listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places, as determined by either the bureau or office?  | No     | The park's NHPA Section 106 Coordinator has determined that no historic properties would be affected by the project. See the attached NHPA Section 106 documentation.  |
| <b>H.</b> Have significant impacts on species listed or proposed to be listed on the List of Endangered or Threatened Species, or have significant impacts on designated Critical Habitat for these species?  | No     | The proposed project would have no effect on any federally listed threatened or endangered species.  |
| <b>I.</b> Violate a federal, state, local or tribal law or requirement imposed for the protection of the environment?   | No     | The project conforms to federal, state, local, tribal laws and requirements.   |
| <b>J.</b> Have a disproportionately high and adverse effect on low income or minority populations (EO 12898)?   | No     | There are no low income or minority populations within or immediately adjacent to the boat launch sites who would be affected by the proposed action, therefore, the proposed action would not disproportionately affect low income or minority populations.   |
| <b>K.</b> Limit access to and ceremonial use of Indian sacred sites on federal lands by Indian religious practitioners or   | No     | This project would not limit access to or affect sacred sites.   |

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| adversely affect the physical integrity of such sacred sites (EO 130007)?   |    |  |
| <b>L.</b> Contribute to the introduction, continued existence, or spread of noxious weeds or non-native invasive species known to occur in the area or actions that may promote the introduction, growth, or expansion of the range of such species (Federal Noxious Weed Control Act and Executive Order 13112)? | No | The project would not contribute to the presence of nonnative plant species. |