

October 21, 2025

Mike Kaputa

Chelan County Department of Natural Resources

411 Washington St. Suite 201

Wenatchee WA, 98801

Mission Ridge Expansion Draft Environmental Impact Statement

Dear Mr. Kaputa,

I am Katherine March, a 30-year resident of Squilchuck Valley. My career included private wetlands consulting, Wetlands and Shorelines Specialist for Washington State Department of Ecology, and Regional Priority Habitat and Species Biologist for Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife. My job was environmental review, technical assistance and aid in development of environmental regulations for local government. The Squilchuck watershed has been the primary place of recreation for my husband, dogs and me, as he and I hike and ride horses there, arguably, as most frequent users.

I have reviewed the DEIS prepared in conjunction with Tamarack, for development at Mission Ridge. With the information provided, I recommend Chelan County at best require an additional DEIS. This is based on vague, inaccurate, falsely assumed, and untrue statements in this DEIS, or they might encourage the developer to put his housing development somewhere else. From what is presented at this time, the information provided shows a project much too ambitious for the sight, with an unwillingness for the applicant to acknowledge protection of resources, adherence to law, and safety for visitors. It would be best to abandon what we see, and deny the project allowing the applicant to begin again if he is determined to move forward. In an effort to minimize redundancy in my notes I will present some specific comments, but the bulk of this will be general issues. Note that due to lack of specific information, the bulk of the DEIS, and redundancy of weakness in the document, all elements were not reviewed by me.

4 FIRE

Fire and increased risk are the biggest concerns with this proposed development.

The DEIS acknowledges that the project area is high fire risk, and does not adequately address this. The project should be denied solely on lack of egress when a fire occurs.

Graphic 4.2-1 illustrates the project's possible impacts on fire risks: There is no data provided that shows fire risk will decrease by 28%.

- A new onsite fire station has only been mentioned as a possibility by the applicant in the DEIS. There is no information on the function, and level of service that might be provided, nor that there is any progress on establishing a fire station. There already is a fire station at the bottom of Squilchuck Rd.
- When the latest snow making reservoirs were built, the plan was to not divert water during the off-ski season. This should not be regarded as a source of extra water during the fire season, which is not ski season, nor should assumptions stretch so far for action on property not owned, and not proposed to be owned by the applicant .
- **Defensible space** has not been specifically described in the DEIS, thus should not be assumed to reduce fire risk at this time, when we don't know what and where it is.
- Shelter-in-place should not be considered a viable option without further planning.

4.2.1.2 Shelter-in-place will at best be only a last resort for refuge. A skier or resident, scared and angry, will want nothing more than to get away from a fire. That means jumping into the car and driving away, not hanging out in a parking lot with 590+ cars fueled up and ready to go into the traffic away from the development, and into the oncoming path of emergency vehicles, surrounded by wildfire, with embers and trees falling.

If the person trying to flee the fire finds an opportunity to drive out of the parking lot and on to Mission Ridge Road, the only egress, that person would join 3999 other people trying to drive down the 2-lane road to safety, wherever that is. Of course, the fire could be coming uphill, and there is no guarantee that the north winds that come from Canada during the hot, dry parts of summer might be something to contend with because the fire would be coming uphill, head on. If that is the case, traffic may not be such an issue because there is no road from the ridge that would provide egress. If luck is with this person, he will reach Wheeler Hill Road in 7.7 miles, the next and only turnoff until the foot of Squilchuck Rd in about 5 more miles, unless it is closed due to fire.

If there is a fire at/near Mission Ridge, there is some certainty that The Stemilt Basin will also be affected. Wheeler Hill Road may not even be an option, and Squilchuck Road will be the only possible way out if there is a fire. Panic and hundreds of cars on a two-lane road, with emergency vehicles trying to make their way to the ridge increases the probability of collisions, and it is not uncommon for wrecks to entirely block the road.

This is unacceptable. The County must reject this plan if there is not a viable plan to save lives.

4.2.1.7 Historical Fire Behavior in the Project Area It is interesting that these fires were noted. There was no wind the day of the Squilchuck Fire. The only fire fighter available initially was one helicopter dipping from irrigation ponds. Later in the day there were two volunteer fire fighters, all that were available according to them, directing traffic at the intersection of Wheeler Hill Road. Since there was no egress uphill at that point, only local traffic was allowed because traffic from there to Mission Ridge would be at risk of being stranded by the fire. Fire fighters mopping up from a fire at Stemilt came later to hold back the fire on Squilchuck that was heading to Wenatchee Hights. The good luck that day was lack of wind. There were no fire fighters available, other than the ones noted above.

4.2.2 How Impacts Were Analyzed

One of the big false assumptions:

.. However, the greatest wildfire risk is unlikely to create a critical egress risk.

The text shows that there is no definite second egress, but has presented some vague possibilities. Among this is widening the existing road. That is not a second egress road, and there is nothing at all convincing that risk would be gone.

The applicant assumes that the County will not require a second road because it is not convenient. Killing people is not convenient. With the probable absence of a second egress road, the County needs to also consider the impacts not only to residents and visitors, but also the danger to people, and their personal property in the Stemilt and Squilchuck watersheds

4.2.3.3 Proposed Mitigation Measures Evacuation on foot through roads and trails is not acceptable. Old, young, and disabled must not be expected to navigate through this territory to run from a fire, as healthy people should not either. There is no doubt that some people who find this the only option will be injured, and only through luck will a safe route and safe movement(?) of the fire be found, maybe in the dark.

4.4.3.2 Impacts From the Operation, Zoning Planning and Policy Consistency This project does not comply with the MPR regulations in the Comprehensive Plan. It is not a Master Planned Resort if there is year-round living. Building heights are also not acceptable. Do not assume that the **Chelan County (Growth Management)**

Comprehensive Plan can be changed to legalize this. That would not meet the intent of the law. Based on this inaccurate assumption alone, the project should be denied.

The size and density of the development cannot be ignored. Two years ago, some major insurance companies began to deny renewal of Homeowners insurance in the valley based on fire risk. One company said the moratorium was due to a fire at Lake Wenatchee, more than an hour drive from the proposed development. Risk of erosion and land movement is mentioned in the October 20, 2025 DEIS. These claims are rarely validated on standard Homeowner's policies. This sort of claim is most often covered through a FEMA flood policy. That may not be available in the near future. Potential buyers in the development should be made aware through full disclosure of costs and difficulties associated with the property. They could be left to hang out to dry, as they increase the cost of property ownership in the valleys. The feasibility of the dense housing development must be questioned.

Preparing management plans and mitigation measures is supposed to happen before the EIS. The DEIS is riddled with rambling text leading the reader to assume the mitigation measures are in place. The alternatives that are not within the text do not show any action that is certain to be performed--may, might must, should, will, etc.-- does not show commitment of the developer to do anything.

Section 1.2.1 , Proposed Project, states:

Public services and utilities, including provisions for emergency/medical services, fire protection, law enforcement/security, a new access road between two base areas (from the existing base area to the proposed second base area), other transportation-related facilities, stormwater management facilities, solid waste management facilities, water service with potable water sourced from both on-site groundwater wells and the Squilchuck Water System operated by Chelan PUD, sewer service from both wastewater treatment provided by Large On-site Sewage Systems (LOSS) and smaller/residential scale On-site Septic Systems (OSS) as well as the potential for conventional or advanced treatment and discharge to Squilchuck Creek, electricity, and fiberoptic telecommunication service.

Nothing in the above has been shown to be more than a thought, although these are critical needs of the development, the resources, and the people using them, with major impacts and no identified mitigation.

The No Action Alternative, and the Developer Alternative (2) are only shown. Although there is quite a lot of bulk devoted to explaining details, such as a definition for air, the DEIS does not get to the point of what is definitely going to be done, what exists, what won't exist, and

what will be the mitigation, which should be no-net-loss. For example, functions and values of specific plant and wildlife habitat is not described, impacts to those habitats are not, and mitigation is omitted, although long lists of possible mitigation are presented.

WAC 197-11-400 (Statutory Authority: RCW 43.21C.110) clearly spells out for the applicant what should be found in the document. Increasing the bulk with good reading may deter readers who cannot commit to the time devoted to reading this wordy DEIS. In spite of all those words, there is no real effort to present what the plan is, what exists, and how to mitigate this all-or-nothing application.

Precedent setting must be a great concern for Chelan County. Were this development to be approved without a great deal of revision, there would be a green light for developers, including the applicant who recently purchased the adjacent parcel, to drop cities all across the ridge lines.

Chelan County has done the best they could with the information provided by the applicant. For more than 3 decades I have watched, and sometimes helped, the County do their best to preserve what we who live here appreciate. Beauty, safety, recreation, carefully planned growth management. The County has realized that here is an opportunity to preserve, rather than repair our special part of the world.

Thank you,

Katherine March

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