

Mount Baker Highway

Corridor Management Plan

This document and accompanying brochure were prepared using funds contributed by member jurisdictions, the Bellingham/Whatcom County Convention and Visitors Bureau, and grants from the Washington State Department of Transportation Heritage Corridors Program and the U.S. Department of Transportation Federal Highways Administration Scenic Byways Program.

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December 22, 1997

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Whatcom County Council of Governments would like to thank the following individuals and organizations for their assistance in developing this plan:

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Jeff Margolis & Dorothy Copp
Mt. Baker Foothills Chamber of Commerce

Debra Paul
Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest
Mt. Baker Ranger District

Jeff Jewell
Whatcom Museum of History and Art

Steve Haugen
City of Bellingham Public Works

Roger DeSpain
Whatcom County Parks Department

Judy Lorenzo & Lori Henderson
Washington State Department of Transportation
Heritage Corridors Program

Thomas Noyes
Washington State Department of Transportation
Northwest Region Planning

Chuck Gibilisco
Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
Wildlife Management Program

Joel Pfundt
Puget Sound Regional Council

and the Mt. Baker Highway corridor residents.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The Mount Baker Highway is a well used corridor providing year-round access to places of solitude and beauty, recreation and relaxation, lodging and rural lifestyles. It enables access to employment and its history is steeped in generations of miners and loggers.

This Corridor Management Plan identifies many of the features, qualities and attractions that encourage both tourists and long-time residents to travel this route.

Unlike most other roads serving mountainous areas, the Mount Baker Highway serves only Mount Baker. The road does not lead to others. Travelers are not “just passing through,” but are seeking something. Some seek solace, other the views; some seek exhilaration and avoidance of news.

Anyone called to visit this road, with its roots in the lowlands, and its end in the sky, can't help but delight in the freedom to roam. There are many faces of this well-traveled route, where a slippery section can give you a start, or a welcome meal a satisfying finish. Whether you're a shopper, a logger, a trucker, or a hiker, you always enjoy the qualities, natural features, history, and recreation offered and made accessible

by this corridor.

As you read this Corridor Management Plan, reflect on your own way of life. You'll be reminded of why you have chosen to live in or visit this wonderful area that is dominated by the dazzling presence of Mount Baker. And, maybe, just maybe, you'll gain a vision of the culture and history that prevailed at the turn of the century.

This plan is offered in the spirit of cooperation, recognition of the region's historical and cultural values, and as a beginning for continuous improvement of safe and beneficial use of this important roadway.

Mt. Baker. Toward the end of the eighteenth century, this towering sentinel was named, then renamed, but whatever the name, whatever the era, Mt. Baker is both unforgettable and bathed in local history. Whatcom County's pioneers were awed by the region just as we are today. The Mt. Baker highway provides a beautiful and unique experience for visitors. Heading east out of Bellingham, as the road winds along the Nooksack River and up through the foothills toward Austin Pass, one can envision some of the experiences that awaited pioneers.

400,000 years ago Mt. Baker was formed primarily by volcanic activity

2. INTRINSIC QUALITIES ASSESSMENT

The focus of a Corridor Management Plan is the intrinsic qualities of the scenic byway. Intrinsic qualities are those positive features considered representative, unique, or irreplaceable. A comprehensive inventory and assessment of a corridor's intrinsic qualities includes the following six categories, when they are present in a corridor: 1) Scenic, 2) Historic, 3) Recreational, 4) Cultural, 5) Natural Features, and (6) Archaeological. These qualities define the byway's character, interest, and appeal to area residents and visitors. Many of the qualities listed below are identified on Map #1.

Scenic

Most of the length of the Mt. Baker Highway follows the Nooksack River. The river originates from the glaciers of Mt. Baker and other tributaries in the watershed. The drive along the highway provides beautiful views of the Nooksack River, and its shorelines of statewide significance. The Nooksack is being considered for designation as a National Wild and Scenic River due to its outstanding and remarkable wild, scenic and recreational values.

Three Watchable Wildlife Sites have been identified near or adjacent to the highway. Those include the Picture Lake Interpretive Trail, Artist Ridge Interpretive Trail, and the Fire and Ice Interpretive Trail.

Mt. Baker

The Mt. Baker corridor provides impressive views of the surrounding hills and mountains. Views of Sumas and Table Mountains, along with the more prominent Mt. Baker and Mt. Shuksan reward the traveler on clear days. Mt. Baker's foothills are covered by dense forest, the mountain itself with glaciers. During the fall, subalpine vegetation provides a rich and colorful backdrop for photo opportunities in popular Heather Meadows, where the perspective of Mt. Shuksan mirrored in Picture Lake is particularly spectacular. At the end of the road, Artist Point provides impressive views of Mt. Baker and Mt. Shuksan.

Historic

The Mt. Baker region has a rich historical background, including numerous sites along the highway. These historical sites may, or may not, be designated on a state, county, or local historical register. Sites registered with the National Register of Historic Places include the Glacier Public Service Center, the Nooksack Falls Historic District, the Mt.

1790	Mt. Baker was named "La Gran Montana del Carmelo" by Manuel Quimper, a Spanish explorer. Referring to its resemblance of the white flowing robes of the monks Carmelite.
1792	Mt. Baker was later re-named by Vancouver after Joseph Baker who was the first in Vancouver's expedition to spot the mountain.
Early 1800's	Eight Nooksack villages including sites near Acme, Deming, and Canyon Creek, were located throughout the Nooksack basin. Nooksack Indians named Mt. Baker Koma Kulshan, meaning white, shiny tall mountain.

Winchester Fire lookout and the Austin Pass Warming Hut. Among the State-registered historical sites are the Lone Jack Mine Site and the Sampson Ranch. Four additional sites are registered with the Whatcom County Historical organization including the Nooksack CCC Camp, the Foster House near the community of Rome, Graham's Store and the Nooksack Power Plant, still in operation.

Recreation

Recreation opportunities in the Mt. Baker corridor are varied and extensive, depending on the season. In the spring and summer visitors can camp, hike, climb, hunt, fish and enjoy water recreation. In the winter months Mt. Baker slopes accommodates downhill and cross-country skiing, snowboarding, hiking and other winter sports.

Parks/Campgrounds

There is one existing park developed along the highway: Silver Lake Park. This park is overseen by Whatcom County Parks and Recreation and provides camping, equestrian trails, and picnic areas. There is also one undeveloped park: the Maple Falls/Glacier Ridge Park providing hiking trails.

There are three main campgrounds along the upper part of the highway within the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest; Douglas

Fir and Silver Fir campgrounds and Excelsior Group Camp.

Nooksack River

Opportunities to enjoy the Nooksack River's recreational potential are enhanced through public access shorelines. There are four public access shorelines fully developed for visitors. These sites usually include a parking area and adequate access to the river for boats and other recreational activities. There is also one undeveloped shoreline site that allows water access, but does not include developed facilities.

Mt. Baker

During the winter season the Mt. Baker ski area is open to downhill skiers, snowboarders, and cross country skiers. Mt. Baker has the highest average snowfall of any ski area in North America, with an average of 595 inches each year. It also boasts the longest ski season in the state of Washington. One hundred seventy thousand skiers use the Mt. Baker Ski Area each winter. Over the past four years, use has grown 50%. In the summer of 1995 the Mt. Baker Recreation Co. completed construction of White Salmon Day Lodge for daytime skiers and visitors.

Between Mt. Baker and Mt. Shuksan lies the Heather Meadows Recreation Area. Originally, it was designated a recreation

1820	Nooksack Indians witnessed a "fiery" eruption at Mt. Baker
1830	Nooksack tribe members were the first people in northern Puget Sound to cultivate white potatoes, which were obtained from Hudson Bay trappers
Early 1850's	The first settlers had entered the region and the need for better roadways, trails, and methods for crossing the Nooksack River and its tributaries became apparent.

area in 1926 and is now part of the Mt. Baker Ski Area in winter and a developed day use area in the summer months. Areas within Heather Meadows providing recreational opportunities include Austin Pass Picnic Area and Artist Point. Additionally, several lakes along with numerous trails, complement recreational opportunities within the area. Heather Meadows is consistently the most visited area along the Mt. Baker highway corridor.

Trails

One of the most prominent recreational activities along the Mt. Baker highway is hiking. There are approximately 100 miles of trails in the region. Many lead into the surrounding Mt. Baker Wilderness. Direct access trails include Horseshoe Bend, Excelsior Pass, Picture Lake, Bagley Lakes, Fire and Ice, Lake Ann, Table Mountain, Chain Lakes and Artist Ridge trails.

In addition to those trails accessed directly from the highway, at least 17 designated trails can be accessed from short distances off the Mount Baker highway providing a wide variety of hiking opportunities. Dedicated hikers travel from other regions to take advantage of the diverse hiking opportunities offered along this corridor. Designated hiking trails in this category include those in Table 1.

- *Damfino*
- *High Divide*
- *Church Mountain*
- *Heliotrope Ridge* *Sky-line Divide* *Boundary Way*
- *Canyon Ridge* *Ptarmigan Ridge*
- *Silesia Creek* *Goat Mtn* *High Pass *
- *Hannegan Pass* *Winchester Mtn* *Yellow Aster Butte* *Tomyhoi Lake* *Welcome Pass*

Table 1 Off Highway Hiking Trails

Tourism

A report Tourism and Market Analysis of Bellingham and Whatcom County was prepared for the Bellingham/Whatcom County Convention and Visitors Bureau in May of 1994. This analysis included such information as why people were visiting the Whatcom County area and what general locations people were visiting. In the summer months, 13.6% of Whatcom County visitors traveled to Mt. Baker and the Ski Area. In winter, 48.9% were traveling to Mt. Baker and the Ski Area. Most of these winter visitors came for the downhill skiing and snow-boarding, the remainder were interested in cross-country skiing, snow-mobiling, sightseeing, walking, and hiking.

A document titled Watershed Analysis of the North Fork Nooksack River, was published by the USDA Forest Service in

1857-1859	A U.S. Northwest Boundary Survey was undertaken to identify possible travel routes.
1857-1890	Several ferries operated in the Nooksack River basin to help settlers cross the Nooksack, including one about a mile above Nugent’s Crossing (Now Nugent’s Corner).
1858	The discovery of gold in the Fraser and Thompson Rivers in Canada brought about a gold rush attracting people to the Whatcom area as a pathway to reach the proclaimed gold mining sites.

1995. As part of the research for this analysis, data was gathered on the number of people that visited Mt. Baker during a twelve month period in 1993 and 1994. A total of 365,000 people visited the Heather Meadows Recreation area, 60,000 visited the Glacier Public Service Center, 48,400 people made use of the trail system, and the Wilderness Area drew 34,000 people. In that same twelve-month period, ten thousand visitors came to use the campgrounds within this watershed.

Cultural

Current cultural events include a spectrum of local activities and events. The community of Deming holds its annual Logging Show during the month of June as well as an annual Oktoberfest. Additionally, there are many locations throughout the corridor area that hold special historic and cultural significance for the Lummi and Nooksack Indians. The annual Ski to Sea Race, sponsored by the Bellingham/Whatcom Chamber of Commerce and Industry, begins with downhill and cross-country ski segments and plummets down the mountain on bikes and foot ending at Bellingham Bay with a kayak-borne dash to the finish. The most prominent cultural aspects of areas and communities associated with the Mt Baker Highway corridor, however, are comprised

of the work of the pioneers and later-arriving citizens of the county as they forged a living from the resources of the region.

Logging, mining, and recreation have had a pivotal and continuous role in how this important area of the county has developed. The entire corridor exists as a result of those activities, and the heritage of the region is the heritage of this scenic highway. No plan or action should overlook the almost 200 year history of mining, logging, and recreation that has defined this area. That heritage is truly an intrinsic value in this corridor.

Natural Features

Nooksack River

The Nooksack River began as a stream cutting a pathway through the region. The stream's pathway and formation was modified by glaciation during the ice age. Now, during the summer, much of the Nooksack's water consists of glacial runoff originating from glaciers on Mt. Shuksan and Mt. Baker. As a result of the river's naturally-occurring shifts and movements, Nooksack Falls, with a total drop of 170 vertical feet, was created. Within the upper river basin is the North Fork Nooksack Research Natural Area which was established in 1937. This Natural Area preserves 1,400 acres of old-growth forest

1858	A groomed trail following the path of an already existing Nooksack Indian trade route, was opened to the Fraser River. Eventually a pathway large enough to accommodate horses was developed. At the same time discussions regarding a pathway for wagons began.
1864	A first, unsuccessful attempt to climb Mt. Baker was made.
1868	Edmund T. Coleman led the first successful ascent of Mt. Baker

and wildlife habitat.

Wildlife

There are approximately 285 different species of mammals, birds, reptiles, and amphibians within the Nooksack River basin/Mt. Baker region. Of these 285 species, 52 are classified as being of heightened management concern. Those species include the spotted owl, the grizzly bear, gray wolf, bald eagle, chinook salmon, peregrine falcon, lynx, mountain goat, bat, wolverine, coho salmon, common loon, great gray owl, spotted frog, and the tail frog.

Mt. Baker

Mt. Baker is a volcano that formed over 400,000 years ago. The mountain was formed by eruptions of lava, cinder, and mud. Continuous eruptions added layer on layer until the mountain we see and enjoy today the mountain had risen to almost 11,000 feet above sea level. Mt. Baker is considered the second most active volcano in the Cascade Range, with its last major eruption of steam occurring in March of 1997. Glaciers, from the last Ice Age, carved and shaped the mountain. Today it still supports about 20 total square miles of active glaciers.

1873	County Commissioners were petitioned to build a road from the town of Whatcom to a Cascade Crossing. Funds were raised to complete the project.
1875	A road to the Nooksack Crossing was competed and named Telegraph Road.
1877	Two large logjams were removed from the Nooksack River opening access to steamboat travel, which later became the main mode of transporting goods and people into the Nooksack River basin

3. INTRINSIC QUALITY MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

The Mount Baker corridor is especially rich in natural beauty, natural history, recreational opportunity, and dynamic and fascinating human history. Comprehensive identification of these resources (detailed in the previous section) greatly enables collaborative preservation and enhancement. The CMP process, though, is designed to additionally provide for the ongoing enhancement of those intrinsic qualities. Beyond promotion of corridor stewardship, this Corridor Management Plan does not suggest any regulations or land use controls beyond those in place at the time this plan is published, such as the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan. Nor does the CMP recommend immediate application for, or designation of, the corridor as a National Scenic Byway.

The development of this plan is an acknowledgement that the identified intrinsic resources add value to the lives of those who live along the corridor. These resources also attract many visitors throughout the year whose choice to visit helps sustain the local economy. Corridor residents, very aware of the abundance of intrinsic qualities and their impact on life and livelihood, have a strong sense of personal responsibility for good policy – a

natural consequence of a natural wonder. The importance of local stewardship was evident at the first Mount Baker corridor public meeting on July 30, 1996.

At the July, 1996 public meeting – which was intended to focus primarily on intrinsic qualities identification – verbal and written community concern was clearly more focused on four issues; traffic and road use, visitor management, planning focus and priorities, and land use implications of the corridor planning process. The meeting echoed support for addressing the needs of the corridor in terms of its intrinsic qualities and transportation infrastructure, but also communicated sincere aversion to any new land-use restrictions or regulations affecting property beyond the highway right-of-way. Stewardship of the corridor is a priority for its residents, but there are concerns that new land-use restrictions, resulting from the corridor plan, could impact the quality of life for corridor communities.

The residential centers of Deming, Maple Falls, and Glacier are concentrated, and not expected to experience transformational growth according to the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan. It is not, therefore, anticipated that any significant new land use regulations will be considered in the vicinity of those communities in the foreseeable future.

1883	The town of Bellingham was officially platted.
1884	The town of Whatcom was platted.
1886	Puget Traction Company built the first headgates for the Nooksack Falls hydroelectric plant
1891	Congress gave the president the right to establish forest reserves.

Further, it is not the intent of this CMP that any such regulations or additional restrictions be invoked as a result of the plan itself.

The intent of this plan is to identify the qualities that make the corridor a pleasant and attractive experience for visitors and to identify potential improvements that can add to the visitor experience as well as enhance safety in the corridor.

1891	Surveyors, H.C Wells, Charles Bagley, and Banning Austin traveled up the Nooksack, leaving permanent records of their travel by naming such features as Austin Pass, Wells Creek, and Bagley Creek.
1891	The steamboat era ended when the construction of railroads and better roadways were built near the existing Mt. Baker Highway alignment.
1893	The road had been extended as far as Boulder Creek, a few miles below Glacier Ridge.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION PLAN

Continued public support and direct participation are essential to keep the corridor management plan from being just another plan on the shelf. The opportunities that currently exist for public participation in corridor related activities are listed below. However, it is not the focus nor responsibility of any one of these organizations to implement the suggestions and recommendations of this plan. Therefore, it is recommended that community based public/private partnerships be formed among citizens and local and state governments to implement the corridor improvements.

These partnerships may consist of two or three participants, or participation might be much broader. Decisions regarding who should participate, and how much, will be community-based, dependent on individual topics and available time, and the number of willing participants.

Current public participation opportunities:

Bellingham/Whatcom Chamber of Commerce
1801 Roeder Avenue
Bellingham WA 98225
Membership

Bellingham/Whatcom County Convention and Visitors Bureau
904 Potter Street
Bellingham WA 98226
Membership

Bellingham/Whatcom Economic Development Council
105 E. Holly Street
PO Box 2803
Bellingham WA 98227
Overall Economic Development Plan for Whatcom Co

City of Bellingham
210 Lottie Street
Bellingham WA 98225
Board of Adjustment
City Council Meetings
Planning Commission meetings
Six-Year Street Construction Program

Glacier Historical Society (forming)
c/o Glacier Public Library
9973 Mt. Baker Highway
Glacier WA 98244
Membership

Mt. Baker Community Steering Committee
c/o Port of Bellingham
PO Box 1677
Bellingham WA 98227
Community Economic Development

Mt. Baker Foothills Chamber of Commerce
PO Box 866
Maple Falls WA 98266
Membership

Port of Bellingham
PO Box 1677
Bellingham WA 98227
Community Economic Development

1893	The Cascade State Road Commission was created to develop a road paralleling the Nooksack River, crossing a pass at Mount Baker, and reaching the Columbia River on the east side of the Cascade Mountains.
1897	C.W. Roth discovered gold at Red Mountain.
1897	Grover Cleveland set aside twenty million acres as a Forest Reserve including the Mt. Baker region.

USDA Forest Service
Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest
Mt. Baker Ranger District
2105 State Route 20
Sedro Woolley WA 98284
Implementation Plan re-evaluation Plan

Washington State Department of Transportation
PO Box 47370
Olympia WA 98504-7370
State Highway System Plan
State Transportation Improvement Program
Washington's Transportation Plan

Whatcom County
311 Grand Avenue
Bellingham WA 98225
Annual Construction Program
Council meetings
Hearing Examiner hearings
Planning Commission meetings
Six-Year Transportation Improvement Program

Whatcom County Council of Governments
2011 Young Street
Bellingham WA 98225
Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program
Metropolitan Transportation Plan
Overall Economic Development Plan for Whatcom Co
Regional Transportation Improvement Program
Regional Transportation Plan

Whatcom Transportation Authority
2011 Young Street
Bellingham WA 98225
Public Transportation Plan

This list is by no means exhaustive. Other participation opportunities exist with water, fire and school districts, statewide tourism and transportation groups, agricultural departments, land trusts and others.

1897	Three men from Sumas, Jack Post, Russ Lambert, and L.F. Van Valkenberg discovered gold at the mine Lone Jack on the Bear Mountain.
1898	The Mount Baker Mining District was established.
1890-1937	Over five thousand mining claims were filed.
1898	Glacier Coalfield containing both anthracite and bituminous coal, was discovered six miles northwest of Mount Baker.

5. GENERAL REVIEW OF ROAD

Local and state transportation plans and improvement programs specify roadway and other associated improvements for the corridor. These plans generally recognize the importance of the SR 542 corridor as a regionally significant route. Several of these plans, for example, call for widening of Sunset Drive from Orleans Street eastward to the Bellingham city limits. The Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan, the WCCOG Metropolitan Transportation Improvement Program, and the Whatcom County Regional and Metropolitan Transportation Plans address the importance of this roadway and identify various needed improvements. Bridge replacement and pavement improvements are among the improvements recommended in these plans. The Nooksack River Bridge at Nugent's Corner, for example, is scheduled for replacement in 1999. Design work for the project has been completed.

The Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT) has been evaluating alternative improvements to the SR 542 roadway, and is currently considering two design options for multi-lane widening, including bicycle lanes and sidewalks for the Orleans to Britton Road portion of the corridor. Both alternatives include signization, traffic channelization,

and curve realignments. These improvements will not negatively impact the corridor's intrinsic qualities. Additionally, WSDOT's twenty-year Highway System Plan includes SR 542 widening to four lanes between Britton Road and SR 9. These improvements will enhance travel safety, and improve the visitor experience.



Figure 1 Narrow shoulders along Mt. Baker Highway

Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan (1997)

Within the Whatcom County Comprehensive Plan several modifications of the roadway have been proposed. They include the addition of a primary bike trail for the majority of the highway, with paved shoulders as designated bikelanes to allow

1899	The community of Deming was officially platted .
1899	All major Nooksack River crossings had bridges, and were developed enough for a wagon to reach Nooksack Falls.
1900	Mt. Baker erupted with a steam cloud extending to an altitude of about 1,000 feet.
1900's	The main source of power for logging was either the horse or oxen.

for safer bicycle travel. The WSDOT has proposed the widening of the highway to four lanes between the Bellingham City limits to its intersection with SR9. They also intend to expand the number of lanes from 2 to 4 between Orleans St. and Britton Rd. with the possible inclusion of bicycle lanes, sidewalks, and intersection

WSDOT System Highway Plan (1997)

The System Highway Plan has made several recommendations for taking steps for collision prevention. For approximately the last 20 miles of the highway, the widening of shoulders, installation of guardrails, and the building of a retaining wall for some areas have been recommended.

- a) Installation of guardrails for MP 52.71-MP 52.76 and MP 53.31-MP 53.52
- b) a retaining wall for MP 53.70-MP 53.79 and MP 53.88-MP 53.91

For the first part of the highway the widening of shoulders and the installation of guardrails has been advised.

- a) for the beginning of the highway from MP 0.65-MP 0.75 and MP1.67-MP 1.73 widen WB shoulders
- b) for MP 5.99-MP 6.15 install 300' guardrail

WSDOT recommends collision reduction techniques through addition of signs, signals, and of realigning curves.

- a) Two areas along the Mt. Baker highway are considered “High Accident Corridors” by the WSDOT. The first area falls between MP 2.5-MP 4.0 on the first part of the highway in the vicinity of Britton and Van Wyck Rd. The highway has more of a severe curve in this section and in order to reduce collisions several changes have been proposed. They involve realigning part of the curve, flattening ditches, and cutting back slopes.
- b) The second corridor falls between MP9.0-MP10.5 with the inclusion of the Nooksack Bridge. The changes being proposed are to widen the Nooksack Bridge, add new guardrails, and maintaining access control on and off the bridge.

Replacement of load restricted bridges, if cost effective as an economic initiative improvement strategy. When driving the highway numerous bridges are scattered throughout the length of the highway. Many of these bridges are relatively old, and are unable to withstand heavy loads traveling across them. This limits the amount of commercial travel moving across the highway. To better accommodate commerce, several of these bridges have been recommended for replacement. These include Coal Cr., Glacier Cr., Fossil Cr., and Half Bridge.

1900-1945	Seventy spur railroads served the county region, including service in the Twin Lakes area, Glacier, Sumas, Maple Falls, and Nooksack area.
1901	The community of Maple Falls was officially platted.
1902	The Bellingham Bay and British Columbia Railroad finished a line connecting the city of Sumas to Glacier opening up a huge area for logging (the railroad no longer exists).

**Whatcom County Council of Governments
- Transportation Improvement Program**

Several improvements have been mentioned in the Whatcom County Council of Governments Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP). These include projects which address the rehabilitation of the roadway pavement including: the distance between Sunset and the Nooksack River bridge, Wales Corner to Hatchery Rd, and Coal Creek Bridge to Wells Creek Rd. Suggestions are made for the channelization of the roadway from Britton Rd. to Kelly Rd., the replacement of the Boulder Creek Bridge, and the widening of the roadway of Sunset Dr. from Orleans St. to the city limits.

**Whatcom County Regional Transportation
Plan-1996**

In the Whatcom County Regional Transportation the widening of Sunset Dr. from Orleans St. to the city limits is again mentioned and the signalization of the Mt. Baker Highway - Britton Rd. intersection.

**Watershed Analysis of the North Fork
Nooksack River - Mt. Baker Ranger
District**

The recommendation is made to realign the entrance of the Nooksack Falls road with the Mt. Baker Highway and pave the intersection.

1903	A sawmill or shingle mill could be found at nearly every significant crossroad in the Nooksack drainage.
1905	The Transfer Act was passed, which creating the United States Forest Service
1905	The Washington Forest Reserve was divided into the Chelan, Wenatchee, Snoqualmie, and Washington National Forests, with the latter reclassified as the Mount Baker National Forest in 1924

6. RESPONSIBILITY SCHEDULE

The Whatcom County Council of Governments, in its roll as the Regional Transportation Planning Organization, will continue to monitor the condition of the Mount Baker Highway Corridor and add value to the corridor whenever possible through small scale safety and convenience improvements.

There will be no one party responsible for implementation of the corridor plan's suggestions and recommendations. The partnerships (see Chapter 4) formed with the impetus and funding available to implement an improvement will be responsible only for that particular improvement.

1906	Nooksack Falls Hydroelectric Plant was placed into operation and the growing community around the plant came to be known as Excelsior. The town included three houses, a hotel, and school.
1906	At the same moment of the San Francisco earthquake a massive avalanche of ice and rock slid off the western side of Mt. Baker which drastically altering its appearance

7. DEVELOPMENT PLAN

This section explains what protections are in place to ensure that existing and future development along the corridor can be facilitated while providing for the enhancement and protection of the Mount Baker Highway Corridor's intrinsic qualities (detailed in Chapter 2).

Mt. Baker Corridor community members, along with other groups, have noted that improvements to both facilities and roads would contribute appreciably to improving highway safety (see Chapters 5 & 12) and enhancing visitor experiences. Currently, people traveling the Mt. Baker Highway in busses and cars may not have access to adequate, signed, rest-stop facilities and visitor and information centers. Residents' concerns about these shortcomings include:

- road safety
- the lack of adequate restrooms causes overuse of private business facilities
- public safety concerns about abuse of unused rest stops including garbage disposal and unauthorized camping
- unrealized scenic potential of existing view points

The consensus is that intrinsic qualities are being compromised and/or overlooked by visitors because of unsightly, unmanaged

rest stops and the lack of adequate, well-integrated visitor facilities. Proposed facility improvements that address these issues are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 11. These initiatives together comprise a development plan. Addressing the current shortcomings now, also ensures that intrinsic qualities are buffered from the impact of future development.

Development outside the highway right of way is currently managed under the requirements of the zoning and/or land use laws of three separate authorities: the USDA Forest Service, Whatcom County, and the City of Bellingham. The relative coverage of each jurisdiction can be seen on Map #2.

In addition to the land use management requirements of the three jurisdictions, many of the corridor's intrinsic qualities identified in this Corridor Management Plan already enjoy special, legislated protection.

- State and County registered historic sites
- State Archaeological sites
- Federal Natural Area (USFS)
- Trail use regulations
- Shoreline regulations

1906	Legislation was introduced to turn the Washington National Forest into the Mt. Baker National Park. The measure did not pass due to concerns of mining and forest restrictions that would be placed on the area.
1907	The first Mt. Baker Forest Service headquarters was built on Gallup Creek in the town of Glacier.
1909	The town of Glacier was officially platted.

8. OUTDOOR ADVERTISING CONTROL COMPLIANCE

Existing sign ordinances, which apply to the Mt. Baker Highway corridor, like the zoning laws, are legislated by Whatcom County, the City of Bellingham, and the USDA Forest Service. Additionally, Mount Baker Highway was incorporated into the State of Washington's Scenic and Recreational Highways Act in 1967. As a state-designated Scenic Highway, Mount Baker Highway is covered by restrictive signage regulations specific to the Act.

Four authorities governing signage

- State Scenic Vistas Act 1971
- Whatcom County
- City of Bellingham
- USDA Forest Service (USFS)

Although signs do not seem to be a current problem, the plan encourages those with concerns about problem signs to call the applicable authority.

Phone numbers of agencies responsible for signage enforcement:

City of Bellingham

Department of Planning & Community Development
Planning & Zoning
(360) 676-6982

Whatcom County

Department of Planning & Development Services
Code Violations
(360) 676-6907

Washington State & USFS

Department of Transportation
Traffic Operations
Assistant State Traffic Engineer
James Shanafelt (360) 705-7282

1911	A group of Bellingham Mountain climbers and businessmen gathered to create the Mount Baker Club promoting the amenities of the Mt. Baker region.
1911	The first Mt. Baker marathon was held in which local mountaineers made trip from Bellingham to the summit of Mount Baker.
1912	A second Mt Baker marathon was held which had an increased amount of festivities as compared to the first race, attracting between fifteen to twenty thousand people. The race was postponed several days due to bad weather.

9. COMMERCE AND SAFETY PLAN

The commerce and safety plan is intended to accommodate commercial activity while maintaining and enhancing the safety of the highway travelers. Access management is a set of strategies to achieve a safe transition between the two. These strategies can be applied to driveways and intersections for all types of land uses.

Many of the accident areas along the highway are the result of vehicles entering the roadway from commercial areas (see Chapter 12). The areas of concern based upon accident rates and observation are the Britton Road intersection, Nugents Corner, Maple Falls, and Glacier. WSDOT should work with local business in these areas to promote safety improvements and incorporate safety features for existing and future access management.

1912	Roads between Maple Falls and Glacier were improved, later becoming part of the Mt. Baker Highway from Bellingham to Deming.
1913	The Third Mt. Baker marathon was held for the third and last time.
1916	In response to the substantial exploitation of the mineral and forest resources in the region ,bills were introduced into the house and senate to establish Mount Baker as a national park.

10. SIGN PLAN

A sign plan is intended to improve the visitor experience through the use of consistent signage along the corridor. The Mount Baker Highway sign plan includes three (3) recommendations:

Logo

Create a Mt. Baker Highway scenic byway logo to be used on gateway and trailblazer signs. The Washington State Department of Transportation has the final say on the design of any signs placed along Mount Baker Highway right-of-way. To aid byway organizations with the implementation scenic signing, WSDOT produced the Scenic Byway and Logo Signing Guidelines (M3001.00), issued December 1996. These guidelines provide design considerations such as sign size, letter size, color and more.

Gateway & Trailblazer Signs

Install one gateway sign and three trailblazer signs. Again, the WSODT Scenic Byway and Logo Signing Guidelines detail the parameters for appropriate design and placement of byway signs.

Community Signs

Install community identity signs for

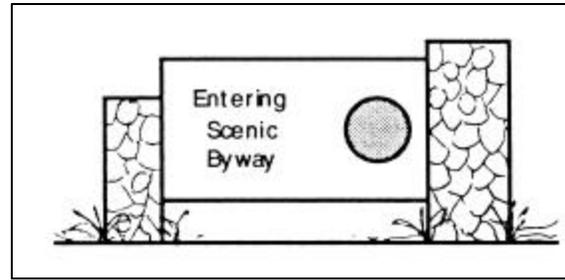


Figure 1, Sample Gateway Sign

communities with existing economic or social activities. These recommended communities are VanWyck, Rome, Nugents Corner, Deming, Welcome, Kendall, Maple Falls and Glacier.

Prominent Feature Signs

Install the prominent feature signs identified in the 1989 USFS Mt. Baker Scenic Byway Implementation Plan (pages 7-10).



Figure 2, Sample Trailblazer Sign

The general sign locations are displayed on Map #3. The final locations will be determined in partnership with the forest service and Washington State Department of Transportation and in compliance with the sign regulations described in Chapter 8.

1917	The proposed legislation to create the Mt. Baker National Park died, faltered and as U.S. legislators focused on WWI.
1921	Charles Finley Easton proposed an extension of the existing road from Excelsior to Mt. Baker. The extension would take the road to Austin Pass.
1925	181 vessels sailed from Bellingham with 150,743,000 board feet of lumber, not including cargoes of box shooks, laths, and shingles with the leading destination being the Atlantic seaboard.

11. VISITOR EXPERIENCE PLAN

While the intent of the typical corridor visitor varies with the season, the experience gained from each trip is similar. The “sense of place” is well defined. Although there are continually varying aspects of the Mount Baker experience, the overall perception of the visit is one of a working community offering tourists fresh country scenes as well as the magnificent scenic panorama of Mount Baker, Mount Shuksan, and surrounding peaks. The grouping of rocky peaks and glaciers comprising the Whatcom County portion of the Cascade Mountain Range form a strong attraction and a welcome break from everyday life.

For some, of course, the destination is the magnificence of the alpine peaks. Whether skiing, hiking, berry picking, or just enjoying the sights, the Mount Baker experience is always memorable. Like most corridors connecting people and places, the Mount Baker corridor is not perfect.

There are a number of shortcomings tending to detract from the overall corridor visitor experience. These shortcomings do, however, offer opportunities to make the experience even better. The following suggested improvements would add both conveniences and additional attractions for

visitors (see map 4).

Watson Park is an existing but closed state-owned rest facility area near Welcome. Formerly outdoor toilets were provided in this shady copse. Now the facility is closed and entry is barred. This rest area was not well maintained prior to closing, and vandalism had made the area dysfunctional and seldom-used.

Unfortunately, closure was the solution for what could be a valuable and attractive addition to the visitor experience. Watson Park has tremendous potential if it is managed properly. It will only continue to decline if left in a closed state. It is the recommendation of this plan to:

1. Reopen the park, and install restrooms, picnic tables, and consider access to the nearby river for fishing and rafting. Or, alternatively, sell the property on the open market and use the proceeds of the sale to provide public restrooms and picnic facilities elsewhere in the corridor. Or, alternatively sell the property to local agencies at a very low price allowing them to make the needed improvements.
2. Set up a maintenance program that could include participation and partnerships with local business.

1925	Lumber and shingle mills cut 340,925,000 board feet of lumber, 381,000,000 of shingles, 38,700,000 of lath, 9,000,000 of box shooks, and 3,500,000 of sash and door frames from areas within Whatcom County.
1925	A cabin was built on Kulshan Ridge to house hikers and skiers by the Mt. Baker Club.
1927	Mt. Baker lodge was built at Heather Meadows, along with nine more miles of road.

The community of Glacier is subject to periods of intense use by visitors and tourists yet restroom facilities are essentially non-existent. Periodically, tour-bus loads of visitors are unable to find respite and are forced to either leave the area or use inappropriate areas potentially creating health concerns. Additionally, the center of the town of Glacier offers a rare opportunity to provide a point of interest. Although the town's rich history is built on logging, mining, and rail transportation, little evidence of that history is portrayed within the town. Means to correct this deficiency are present in that open space is available in the center of town, and individuals and groups resident in the area seem to support the idea of some sort of historical display and interpretive center. It is the recommendation of this plan to:

1. Establish a rest room facility open enough hours to serve the traveling public, and close enough to the center of town that it is open available to a broad range of visitors.
2. Set up a maintenance program for the rest rooms in cooperation with local Glacier business interests.
3. Install a visitor's center in conjunction with the newly-formed Glacier

Historical Society and local business interests.

Nugent's Corner is a notable crossroads with the Mount Baker corridor. A rich mix of local and tourist services are available in this small community. The intersection of State Route 9 with the corridor mixes significant truck and passenger traffic. Nugent's Corner is a convenient meeting place where people bound for Bellingham, and others headed east for recreation can gather to make ride sharing a reality. This occurs frequently in an informal way. The Whatcom Transportation Authority (WTA) has, through informal agreement with a local church, established a "park and ride" location within the church's parking lot. It is the recommendation of this plan to:

1. Establish a more formal park and ride lot at some location in the Nugent's Corner community.
2. Establish, in cooperation or partnership with local business, public restrooms and a public rest area with restrooms and a picnic or sitting area.

One of the important visitor experiences in traveling the Mount Baker corridor is catching a glimpse of the snow and glacier covered peak of Mt Baker. Unfortunately, a number of factors, other than cloud cover

1927	Mt. Baker Ski Club was formed.
1931	After only four years of being open, the Mt. Baker lodge burned down.
1933	The Civilian Conservation Corps established by President "Teddy" Roosevelt built numerous roads, campgrounds trails, cabins, and fire lookouts in the Mt. Baker region.
1933	The first CCC Glacier area camp was built on the former site of the town of Shuksan, thirteen miles east of Glacier. Another campsite was built at Boulder Creek, which was several miles west of Glacier.

obscure views of the peak and viewpoints are limited to certain specific locations until reaching elevations above the tree line. The tree line is near the end of the road at the Mt. Baker Ski Area. It is the recommendation of this plan to:

1. Clear undergrowth vegetation at the existing viewpoint near milepost 30.
2. Expand, if possible, the roadside viewpoint at approximately milepost 29.

Several businesses along the corridor have existed long enough to become local points of interest and destinations unto themselves, and they also attract visitors new to the area. Among these are the retail center just east of Interstate 5, Nooksack Casino in Deming, Deming Speedway, Carol's Coffee Cup, Mt. Baker Winery, several tree farms, Graham's Store in Glacier, and Silver Lake Park just north of the corridor. Many of these attractions are pointed out in the Bellingham/Whatcom County Convention and Visitor Bureau visitor's brochure that is a companion to this plan (see figure 4).



1934	A cabin was built on Copper Mountain by CCC as a national Forest Service fire lookout, on Winchester Mt. in 1935, and Excelsior and Goat Mountains in 1936. Additional lookouts were subsequently built.
1935	The newly formed Mount Baker Ski Club built Galena Cabin just below Heather Meadows to house skiers.
1935	The Pacific Northwest Ski Association held its first slalom race on Mount Baker.

12. HIGHWAY DESIGN & MAINTENANCE STANDARDS

The Mt. Baker Highway supports a full range of transportation users including pedestrians, bicyclists, equestrians, motorcyclists, automobiles, pickup trucks, recreational vehicles, buses, and commercial trucks. Many of the written and verbal comments from the corridor residents centered on the highway's inability to safely accommodate these multiple uses.

Traffic Volumes

The annual average daily traffic volumes (AADT) for the Mt. Baker Highway can be seen in Figure 5. The available traffic count data for the highway was only available for specific points along the highway. The data gathered is a tabulation of traffic counts from the WSDOT starting from 2/15/94 and ending on 11/5/96. Traffic volumes vary from highs approaching 30,000 vehicles per day near Interstate 5 to as few as 250 vehicles near the end of the road. Traffic volume steadily decreases toward the east except for increased flows near intersections with Britton and Smith Roads. The high traffic volume in the first miles of the highway is attributable to the presence of I-5 on-ramps and off-ramps, and the strong commercial presence of Sunset Square.

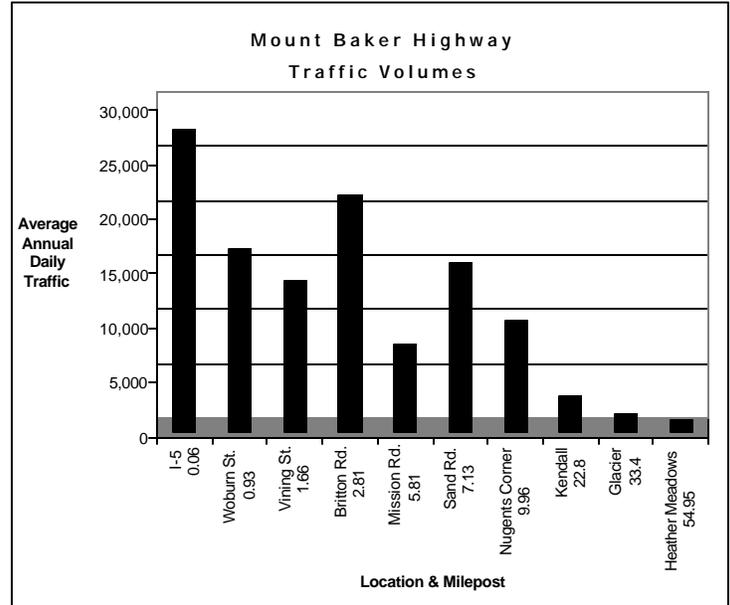


Figure 4 Annual Average Daily Traffic Volume (WSDOT)

In the *Watershed Analysis of the North Fork Nooksack River* the number of vehicles per day was counted for the National Forest Scenic Byway portion of the highway. This section constitutes the last 24 miles of the highway. Between 1993-1994 an average of 330 vehicles per day were counted.

1935	Hollywood came to the mountain when Jack London's "Call of the Wild" was filmed, and followed two years later by "The Barrier."
1943	The Mt. Baker recreation area was closed and the property sold at a sheriff's auction to the Larrabee Real Estate Company.
1946	The Mt. Baker recreation property was sold again to A.W. Talbott.
1950	By the time the Kulshan cabin was crumbling, it was dismantled and another built adjacent to the original sight.

Accidents

Accident figures were compiled from Washington State Department of Transportation data, captured between January 1986 and September 1996. The overall number of accidents on the Mt. Baker highway are shown in figure 6. The number starts and stays high for the first five miles and then quickly drops. The number of accidents begins rising again near milepost 25, and peaks at mile post 30. Thereafter, accident frequency declines again but shows an additional peak that stabilizes at about milepost 50. Accident rates then remain about the same through the remaining 17 miles of the road.

The high number of accidents in the beginning of the highway may be attributed to the high traffic volumes stemming from the I-5 on ramp and off ramp, as well as the Sunset Square commercial area. The smaller peak in the middle section of the highway may be from the traffic flow from SR 547.

Figure 7 shows the number of accidents within the first mile of the Mt. Baker Highway. The first mile of the highway has the highest number of accidents with an annual average of almost 30 accidents in the ten-year period. The highest number of accidents occur in the Orleans Street vicinity. Plans to improve the intersection are included in the City of Bellingham, WSDOT, and Whatcom County Council of Governments' Transportation

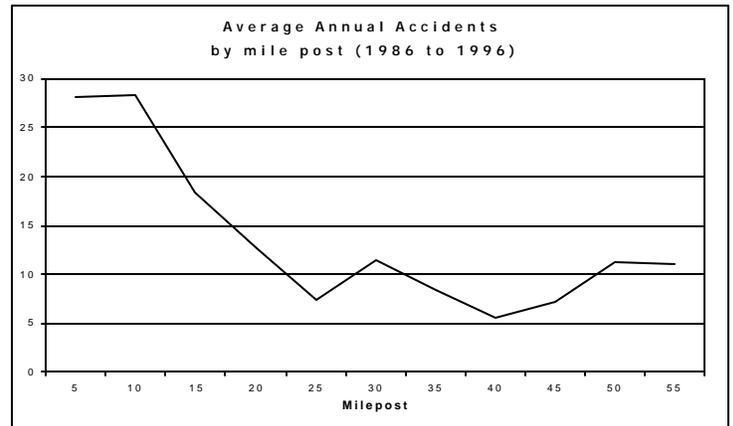


Figure 5, Mt. Baker Highway Average Annual Accidents (1986 – 1996)

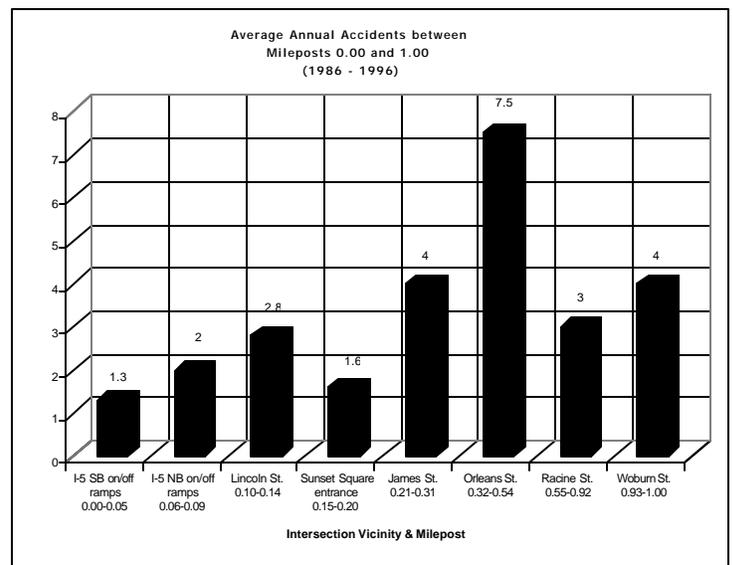


Figure 6, First Mile Average Annual Accidents (1986–1996)

1952	The Mount Baker Development Company acquired the Mt. Baker recreation area property.
1953	A new chair lift was built and buildings were remodeled by the Mt. Baker Development Co., which opened up Mount Baker to skiers again.
1963	The Twin Sisters Range olivine deposit was opened for quarrying.
1967	Mt. Baker Highway from Deming east to Artist Point was designated a Washington State Scenic and Recreation Highway.

Improvement Plans and the Whatcom County Regional Transportation Plan. The first mile of the highway also has the highest number of traffic volumes on which may be reason for the high number of accidents. Improvements have also just been completed with the widening of the Sunset Bridge and upgrading of the intersection with the I-5 on-ramps and off-ramps which may help the traffic flow along the roadway.

When reviewing the number of accidents by month from January 1986 to September, 1996, the highest number of accidents occurs in the month of December. Accident levels stay relatively low during the spring and summer months. In October the accident rate rises quickly. The higher accident rate continues until February when it begins to taper off. The high increase in accidents during the winter months may be attributable to heavy recreational use in conjunction with weather induced poor road conditions.

Safety Improvement Opportunities

Following is a list of highway safety opportunities along the highway. The letters “MP” refer to the milepost closest to a given condition or safety opportunity.

MP 2.81- Britton Road

At this intersection cars turning onto Britton Road are not provided a left or right

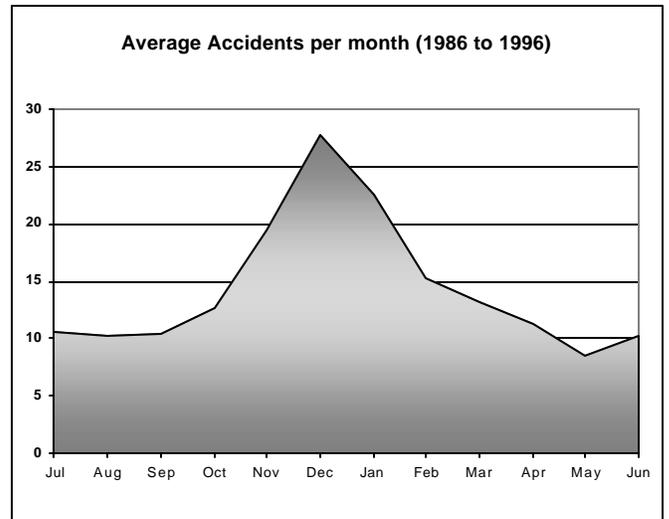


Figure 7, Average Accidents per Month (1986 - 1996)

turn lane. As vehicles are making left or right turns onto Britton Road, other automobiles coming behind them at a much higher rate of speed have limited time to react to stopped vehicles. Turn lanes would allow cars to safely turn onto Britton Road

MP 9.67- Nooksack River Bridge

The Nooksack River Bridge is a temporary replacement for the previous bridge washed out in the early 1990s. The current bridge is barely wide enough to allow for passage of bi-directional traffic on the bridge. Large vehicles passing on the bridge have minimal passing room.

1971	A small steam fountain erupts from Mt. Baker.
1972	The last remains of the town of Excelsior were torn down leaving only the Nooksack Falls Power Plant.
1973	The “Mount Baker marathon” served as the inspiration for “Ski to Sea,” a race involving skiers, runners, cyclists, canoeists, and sailors in a five thousand foot descent race from the Mount Baker ski area to Bellingham Bay.

MP 9.98- Lawrence Road (SR 9 north)

Vehicles turning westbound from SR 9 onto Mt. Baker highway are not afforded adequate space to accelerate to the speed of on coming cars. Trucks use this route heavily and would benefit from acceleration/deceleration lanes. Commercial development with uncontrolled access near the intersection further aggravates the problem and increases the potential for rear-end collisions. Enhanced traffic controls in this area would alleviate many of the safety problems existing at this intersection.

MP 22.80-22.91- Kendall Road (SR 547)

Two access points for Kendall Road onto Mt. Baker Highway connect on a long curve. The curve does not allow adequate sight distance, nor does it provide sufficient acceleration/deceleration distance. Substantial speed differential exists between Kendall Road vehicles and Mt. Baker vehicles as they attempt to merge.

MP 24-57 - curves in the roadway

The remainder of the roadway contains numerous sharp curves. When cars travel along these curves at high speeds or during hazardous road conditions, the probability of accidents increases. Straightening these curves, addition of guardrails, and maintenance of painted fog and centerlines will reduce the possibility and severity of future accidents.

1975	Steam erupted from Mt. Baker out of Sherman's Crater.
1989	The last 24 miles of the Mt. Baker Highway was designated as a National Forest Scenic Byway.
1993	The Mt. Baker Highway, from Deming to Interstate 5 in Bellingham, was designated as a Washington State Scenic and Recreation Highway.
1997	Two plumes of steam were seen shooting from Mt. Baker.

13. MARKETING NARRATIVE

The entire length of Mount Baker Highway will not automatically be designated as a National Scenic Byway as a result of this plan. The corridor is an important local resource valued by both local citizens and tourists. It offers substantial value as a transportation route to significant recreation opportunities as well as local economic interests. This corridor, however, is not likely to compete favorably with other routes that are more in the category of “destinations unto themselves.” Additionally, the potential for controls on local land use associated with national designation is very unpopular locally.

Marketing of this corridor should focus on the existing 24-mile National Forest Scenic Byway. This segment of the highway from the town of Glacier east to the end of the road at Artist Point is the destination for most visitors. It is hoped that partnerships identified in this plan among the Washington State Department of Transportation, Whatcom County, the Forest Service, the Council of Governments, the Bellingham/Whatcom County Convention and Visitors Bureau, and local businesses and citizens will be formed. It is further hoped that the results of these partnerships will include a safer, friendlier visitor experience in the Mount Baker Highway corridor.

The first steps in the direction outlined above have been made by during activities conducted in the course of completing this plan. Those first steps include identifying shortcomings in the corridor and beginning work toward correcting those deficiencies. The visitor’s brochure produced by the Convention and Visitors Bureau will serve to draw attention to areas of interest in the corridor and act as a very positive marketing

tool, while giving pertinent safety information.

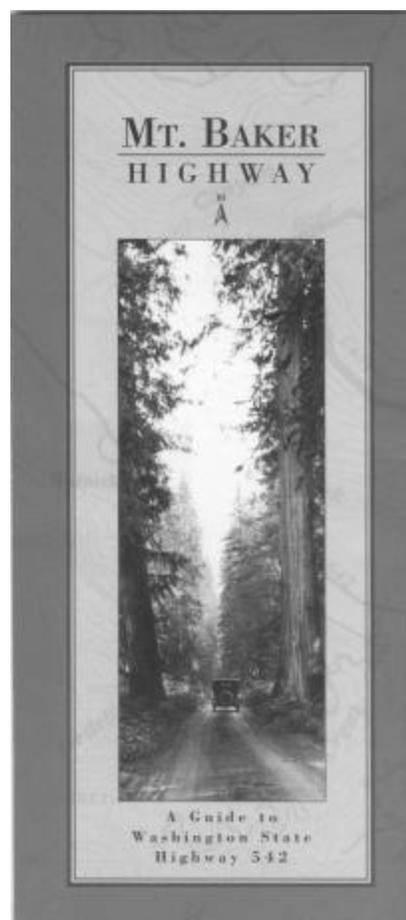


Figure 8, Corridor visitor brochure

14. INTERPRETATION PLAN

The visitor's brochure accompanying this plan is the first step in creating materials and facilities to interpret Mt. Baker Highway's intrinsic qualities. The next step will be to implement the sign plan (Chapter 10) and visitor experience plan (Chapter 11) recommendations of this plan. The USDA Forest Service and the Washington State Department of Fish & Wildlife are also working on interpretation plans for Watchable Wildlife sites along the corridor.

Forest Service staff have developed proposals for additional interpretive sites along the Forest Service section of Mt. Baker Highway. The Forest Service's Mt. Baker Scenic Byway Implementation Plan was created in 1992. It proposed several projects including the creation of an interpretive brochure, construction of information kiosks and signs, and reconstruction of a miners cabin and abandoned trail. The Forest Service has identified a need to re-evaluate the 1992 Implementation Plan and bring planning efforts up to current management direction.

In 1997, the Department of Fish & Wildlife's Nooksack Basin Watchable Wildlife Program first phase was developed to create a year-round, self-guided wildlife viewing tour for the public. In all, six areas will be located near or adjacent to the Mt. Baker Highway.

Concurrent with these efforts should be the creation of an interpretive audio tape and companion guidebook. These materials will familiarize tourists with the intrinsic qualities that are central to the corridor's Scenic and Recreational Highway designation. The Washington State Arts Commission is the appropriate partner for this project.

