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May 10, 2016

The Honorable Anthony R. Foxx
Secretary
U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Avenue, S.E.
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Secretary Foxx,

I write to urge you to approve Emergency Relief for Federally Owned Roads (ERFO) program funding requested by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) as soon as possible so that local officials can make emergency repairs to roadways and address damage caused by recent winter storms.

As a result of heavy rains and severe weather in December 2015, numerous forest roads in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest (GPNF) were extensively damaged. Specifically, the north section of Forest Road 23 in the GPNF suffered several washouts, and without repair the U.S. Forest Service says the road will be closed for the remainder of the year. Repairing Road 23 is the highest priority for road repairs on the GPNF, and it is my understanding the USFS has applied for funds available to the Federal Highways Administration.

Forest Road 23 is integral to the GPNF. It connects Trout Lake and the Cowlitz River Valley, which is a popular route and the major thoroughfare for many residents and visitors alike in the summer months. Furthermore, Road No. 24, Road No. 25, and Road No. 26 are impassible from this year's snowfall and storms, which leaves motorists in the area with few options. This is a major blow to rural residents, and it will severely restrict recreational opportunities and negatively impact the local recreational economy and the jobs it supports.

For these reasons, delaying Road No. 23 construction to the end of 2016 with the possibility of not reopening the road until 2017 is unacceptable. I urge you to grant the USFS request for Emergency Relief funds to help address Road No. 23 as expeditiously as possible in order for repairs to take place this year. I appreciate your work to ensure Southwest Washington residents and visitors to our region have uninterrupted access to these crucial roadways.

Sincerely,


Jaime Herrera Beutler
Member of Congress