

Oak Rankin

In the wake of the deadly 2014 Oso Slide, Glacier Peak Institute was formed to connect youth, ecosystems and community in the Darrington area. Prior to the slide, our poverty had risen by 50%, special education rates have tripled, and schools have been cut by 1/3. Help intended for rural timber communities never came to fruition. 1/25 youth are dying before 30, and the region is not investing in these places. Kids are no longer getting outside, yet we watch the buses of urban nearby schools passing through our town to access the forests we cannot.

For the past 2 months, we have been shutting down our outdoor youth programs due to the decrease in air quality due to wild fire smoke, at times this exceeds 500. This is the only reason we stop programs. The town of Darrington has been consistently in the top 10 worst AQI scores in the world. As environmental regulations have changed over the last 30 years, our poverty has risen and the salmon populations continue to decline. Whether it is the recreation, timber, or restoration economy, these have all moved to our urban areas. I am concerned that as the "air quality" measures come into effect, they will also be forced onto disenfranchised rural communities, with the projects paying contractors, nonprofits, and government agencies from urban areas to do the work in our poor area. There will not be an equal ask of the "whole" of the society for air quality. If the Dep. of Ecology does decide to move this forward, we ask that they consider impacts on marginalized communities. Where as the smoke and air pollution impacts our urban neighbors as well (albeit less AQI than us), the loss of life in our community has been more heavily impacted by the loss to the timber economy, and the lack of the region to invest in the community.