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News Release

U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers

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September 25, 2015

Spirit Lake Outlet Tunnel Scheduled for Repair

PORTLAND, Ore. – The U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers are pleased to announce the awarding of a contract to repair the Spirit Lake Outlet Tunnel near Mount St. Helens on the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. The repairs will address critical short-term needs while more sustainable long-term solutions are explored.

The \$3 million contract was awarded to Cat Works, LLC of Battleground, Washington. Repairs will begin in October.

“Protecting downstream communities is our number one priority,” said Jim Peña, Regional Forester. “These important repairs will reinforce the outlet tunnel’s integrity and give us time to work with our partners to find a more viable solution for this geologically active area.”

The 1.6-mile Spirit Lake Outlet Tunnel was built after debris from the 1980 Mount St. Helens eruption blocked natural outflows for Spirit Lake, causing rising lake levels and concerns about flooding. In October 2014, a routine inspection revealed damage to the outlet tunnel lining, deposits of clay in the outlet tunnel’s interior, and a 2.5-foot reduction in outlet tunnel diameter due to the encroachment of surrounding rock. A subsequent inspection this spring revealed further damage and an additional half-foot reduction in outlet tunnel diameter.

As the only outlet to Spirit Lake, the outlet tunnel plays a critical role in regulating the water level. An outlet tunnel failure could result in a destructive breach of the lake’s retention material, leading to significant damage downstream.

During the repairs contractors will install additional structural supports, restore the outlet tunnel’s diameter to nine feet, and excavate the material that has seeped into the outlet tunnel’s interior.

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