

Response to questions submitted by Congressman Westerman.

- 1) How much time and money has Wintergreen spent on this route and the red tape associated from NPS.

Our files date back to the year 2000. We initially worked with Congressman Virgil Goode. A large delegation including County Administrators, Chiefs from Virginia Department of Forestry, and others met with Congressman Goode in Washington DC. The National Park Service showed no desire to assist us on the project.

Congressman Perriello attempted to maintain forward progress; however, no progress was noted.

Congressman Hurt attempted to maintain forward progress; however, no progress was noted.

Congressman Garrett did not have enough time in office to fully engage in our project.

Congressman Denver Riggleman made significant progress. The Acting Director of the National Park Service, David Vela visited the project site with Congressman Riggleman. Director Vela cut the visit short because in his opinion the project was so needed and simple that wasting any further time debating it would be uncalled for. Sadly, Director Vela was not nominated/confirmed by the Trump administration, and he left office before approving construction.

Congressman Good visited the site. Rep Good did propose some code language in support of the exit, however the bill did not pass. The bill was tied to NPS funding from Congress.

Congressman McGuire has visited the site, and more progress has been made under his watch than we have previously accomplished.

In our opinion, NPS has used the frequent turnover in the 5th District to “run out the clock”. In fact, despite years of inquiry, it wasn’t until Director Vela visited Wintergreen that we were told of the official process needed to get approval. Wintergreen immediately hired the best firms to complete all data collection related to the official request. We were making steady progress up until the pandemic. After that hold we started making progress again up until Hurricane Helene devastated the Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina. Again, we feel as if stall tactics were employed. Our attorneys/consultants asked for preliminary comments on studies multiple times and were told the Hurricane repairs had preempted any review. On the same day that Congressman McGuire submitted an inquiry of NPS, all of their comments were emailed to our team.

Not including any costs associated with employees of Wintergreen Property Owners Association, the costs of surveys, studies, permits, etc. stands at \$133,602. If you were to add the costs associated with time invested over a 25-year period, WPOA easily has 200k invested.

Furthermore, after 25 years of failure to obtain NPS permission, Wintergreen invested in a garage structure which has been constructed 30' from the NPS boundary where the egress needs to exist. This structure will house earth moving equipment and there will be sufficient stockpiles of stone to construct the road emergently. This project will total 400k upon completion. Completion is anticipated in April. We are planning a very large media event to cut the ribbon on our "road to nowhere". Our total invested in the structure thus far totals 252k.

- 2) From a public safety standpoint, how would a secondary egress route change your ability to protect residents and visitors during a fast-moving wildfire or medical emergency, and what risks do you face today when there is only one way out.

We know from fire-behavior modeling that wildfire at Wintergreen would likely reach the mountain through one of five valleys. Of these five, two would certainly require the emergency egress. Hence, there is a 40% chance that our residents would not be able to evacuate if a fire occurred tonight. If that were to happen, we would attempt to cut/build the escape path very quickly. Because this has never been tried, we can't be 100% certain it will work.

Our absolute fallback position would be to gather all residents and guests in our conference facility. This would allow us to place everyone in one structure. The Fire Department would then focus all of its efforts on defending that single structure. In theory, our entire community can burn down while our citizens remain safe in the conference center. Again, this is an untested theory.

There are three main roads within the Wintergreen Mountain Resort village. They are; Wintergreen Drive, Laurel Springs Drive, and Blue Ridge Drive. All three of these roads are paved, wide, and well-marked. Blue Ridge Drive services nearly 500 condo units. Both Wintergreen Drive and Blue Ridge Drive connect with Laurel Springs Drive. Laurel Springs Drive is the road which closely parallels the Blue Ridge Parkway. The Parkway is of course a two-lane paved road which leads directly to Interstate 64, just 9 miles to the North. It would be difficult to dream up a better escape route, if only the connection to the Parkway existed.

It's interesting that Congressman Westerman's question asks about not only wildfire, but "medical emergencies" as well. Most people only focus on wildfire; however Congressman Westerman is on-point. There are many scenarios which aren't difficult to imagine which could press the emergency egress into life-saving service. For example, if an LP gas tanker flipped on Wintergreen Drive at the same time a resident or guest were having a heart-attack, we would not be able to transport that patient to a hospital. We could call in a helicopter if weather permitted, however flights from the mountain are frequently denied due to low cloud ceilings and/or high winds. Being able to simply open a gate to drive an ambulance out via the Blue Ridge Parkway would be consequential.

Worthy of note: Wintergreen Fire & Rescue is the primary first-responder agency covering 20 miles of the Blue Ridge Parkway, 25 miles of the Appalachian Trail, and all of the National Park spaces in between. Over the same 25-year period when we have been requesting the National Park Service to assist us with our own safety we have invested countless amounts of resources in protecting the safety of Park guests. For example, on December 14, 2025 over 300 labor hours were invested to locate, treat, and remove an injured hiker in sub-zero temperatures. The call lasted over 10 hours. The hiker, a physician, would not have survived the experience without our intervention.

I once asked an NPS representative “What if we just stopped answering 911 calls in the National Park until our emergency egress is approved?” He answered, “The National Park Service does not have resources to respond to guest emergencies. We rely upon cooperator agencies such as yours to protect park guests. If you’re comfortable with the ethics associated with simply not responding, then that would be on you.” Using that logic, NPS could approve an egress path which would clearly affect the safety of their neighbors and their failure to do so would imply they aren’t at all concerned about ethics.