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February 19, 2020

Craig Roberts
Clackamas County Sheriff
9109 SE Sunnybrook Blvd
Clackamas, OR 97105

Dear Sheriff Roberts,

The Mazamas, founded on the summit of Mt Hood 125 years ago and deeply engaged in all areas of mountain recreation and communities, are concerned for the public's safety. The announcement of the Clackamas County Sheriff's Department's decision to develop and deploy its own SAR team as soon as this summer, while disbanding the four teams currently providing exceptional search and rescue services around Mt Hood, is unreasonable. Our 3,600 members and the larger public have relied on and have been served well by the Clackamas County Sheriff's Department and the volunteer search and rescue units working collaboratively with the interest of the public as their first and foremost priority.

With an extensive history and countless hours spent on Mt Hood and its surrounding areas over our 125 years, we recognize the unique hazards and risks on and around the Mountain. We also recognize the burden of responsibility for public safety, and understand that operating search and rescue is becoming increasingly complex. We believe it will continue to become more complex as population increases, demand for services increase, and the landscape of liability and risk becomes more difficult.

As of today, as one of the largest user groups on Mt Hood that rely on the Clackamas County Sheriff and the volunteer search and rescue units, we have not heard a clear path forward for how a new team would be trained, how it would be funded, or the capacity for Clackamas County to develop and deploy a team. We strongly believe that a wholesale dismantling of current well-trained and invested search and rescue teams and their members is not a viable path forward for public safety.

In addition to search and rescue services, investments in prevention of incidents through public outreach and education are made by the search and rescue units. We have not heard plans for how this essential service, which prevents need for rescue, would be replaced in the Sheriff's plan.

Again, the Mazamas, with our strongest sentiment, urge the Sheriff's Department, Portland Mountain Rescue, Mountain Wave Search and Rescue, Pacific Northwest Search and Rescue, and North Oregon Regional Search and Rescue to re-engage in a collaborative dialogue to identify and explore a mutually beneficial and public-serving path forward.

With gratitude for your service,

Mitsu Iwasaki
Executive Director, Mazamas