



April 27, 2022

Washington State Recreation and Conservation Funding Board
 PO Box 40917
 Olympia, WA 98504-0917

Re: Letter of support for WWRP State Lands Development, Project #22-1286, North Fork Nooksack River Access

Dear Members of the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board:

The 27 undersigned conservation, recreation, wildlife organizations, and businesses are writing in support of the WWRP State Lands Development Grant #22-1286 for the North Fork Nooksack River.

The North Fork Nooksack River, located in Whatcom County, is known for its natural beauty and cultural resources. Flowing from Mount Baker in the Northern Cascade Range, this remarkable river is popular with boaters and paddlers who are able to use the river for a range of experiences in a pristine natural environment. Connecting from the Pacific Ocean via Bellingham Bay and the mainstem Nooksack River, the North Fork is part of the historic migratory routes for several protected salmon species. This river is also culturally important to several native people who have historically used the land and the river for thousands of years. Tribal governments such as the Nooksack Indian Tribe and Lummi Nation are actively working in the Nooksack watershed to restore the riparian forest and protect critical salmon habitat.

As identified during previous planning efforts, this project addresses a gap in public access to the North Fork Nooksack River that has caused several issues and concerns. Current access sites, Horseshoe Bend Trailhead and Welcome Bridge are 19 miles apart, a distance that is too far for day trips which is leading boaters and paddlers to establish unmanaged sites to put-in and take-out their boats to accommodate a day trip. Illegal trespassing on public and private lands has become an issue, as it often leads to the destruction of sensitive riparian habitat and works against current efforts to restore the riparian forest in the area. User groups are also parking along the shoulder of Washington State Route 542 creating a safety issue for both vehicles driving through the area, and pedestrians loading and unloading their gear. This has become a concern of the Washington Department of Transportation who owns and manages the state route. Establishing a managed site within this area for river access and outdoor recreation opportunities will help alleviate some of these issues and concerns.

The project has the following goals and objectives:

1. **Provide Safe and Sustainable Public Access** - This site aims to provide for safe access to outdoor recreation opportunities through the use of low-impact site interventions. The proposed project has the potential to accommodate multiple activities with facilities for boaters, anglers, and members of the general public desiring access to the water.
2. **Protect, Enhance, and Restore Natural Systems** - This project would provide public access while also enhancing ecological function. The site is directly adjacent to the Whatcom Land Trust's 110-acre Maple Creek Reach conservation site. The parking area would be separated from the riverbank allowing for extensive riparian restoration of native vegetation including conifers. The public will be able to access the river without degrading sensitive habitat.
3. **Increase Connections and Partnerships** - This project provides opportunities for increased connections and partnerships between the Washington Department of Natural Resources, the Whatcom Land Trust, the Nooksack Indian Tribe, and all river users. The benefits include shared access, opportunities, and amenities.

Many of our organizations have supported sustainable recreation opportunities on Washington's public lands including the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest and within our state park system. According to the Outdoor Industry Association, each year in Washington, outdoor recreation generates \$26.5 billion in consumer spending and 264,000 direct jobs. The steady flow of visitors is critical to the economies of local communities like Maple Falls and other rural communities. Visitors stop to spend money on meals; buy groceries; purchase gear; sign up for paddling, horseback riding, backpacking, mountain biking, or other recreational trips; and stay overnight at hotels and vacation rentals in towns that are the gateways to our public lands.

We urge you to support the grant request for this important access site that will provide recreational, economic and safety benefits to a wild river system on the North Cascades landscape.

Sincerely,

Wendy McDermott
Director, Northwest Region
American Rivers

Thomas O'Keefe
Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director
American Whitewater

Tom Uniack
Executive Director
Washington Wild

Tomas J. Tabisola
President
Washington Kayak Club

Pat Hesselgesser
Chair
WA State Council of Trout Unlimited

Betsy Robblee
Conservation & Advocacy Director
The Mountaineers

Megan Birzell
Washington State Director
The Wilderness Society

Gabe Epperson, MPA
Executive Director
Whatcom Land Trust (Bellingham, WA)

Layne Carter
Operations Manager
Aslan Brewing Co. (Bellingham, WA)

Eric Hayes
Chief Marketing Officer
Superfeet (Ferndale, WA)

Jesse Swedlund
President
Paddle Trails Canoe Club

Nathan Chapdelaine
President
BEWET

Rebecca Post
President
Washington Recreational River Runners

Taylor Robertson
Marketing & Sales Director
Werner Paddles

Mari Kemper
Owner
Chuckanut Brewery

Robert Kaye
Chair, Conservation Committee
North Cascades Audubon Society (Bellingham, WA)

Mike Clancy
Conservation Chair
Washington State Federation of Flyfishers
International

Yvonne Kraus
Executive Director

Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance

Arthur Campbell
President
North Central Washington Audubon Society

Rich Simms
Founding Board Member
Wild Steelhead Coalition

Harry Romberg
National Forest Committee Chair
Sierra Club – Washington Chapter

Matt Perkins
President
Washington Climbers Coalition

J. Michelle Swope
Washington State Coordinator
Native Fish Society

Colleen Kuehl
Owner
Wander Brewing (Bellingham, WA)

Dave Werntz
Science and Conservation Director
Conservation Northwest

Larry Lober
Membership Coordinator
Greater Bellingham Running Club

Kim McDonald
President
Fish Not Gold

