



October 19, 2016

Recreation and Conservation Office  
P.O. Box 40917  
Olympia, Washington 98504-0917

**RE: Washington Pass Spires Access Trail Project #16-2387**

To Whom It May Concern:

We are writing to express our shared support for the Washington Pass Spires Access Trail Project (#16-2387). This stewardship project is an extensive collaborative effort with the Methow Valley Ranger District (MVRD) of Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest and dozens of local, state, and national conservation and recreation partners.

The Washington Pass Spires area along the North Cascades Scenic Corridor, specifically the sub-alpine environment on the west slope of Liberty Bell Mountain, has been accessed by climbers and hikers since the 1940s. For thousands of people from diverse locations, this “trail” has been their first foray into the alpine areas of Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest and the North Cascades. Users from all over the world come to climb and simply hike up towards the spires to enjoy the incredible landscape. It is a spectacular area that includes two of the most popular alpine climbs in Washington State, the Beckey Route on Liberty Bell and the South Arête of South Early Winter Spire, often first objectives for new alpine climbers.

However, over time the route from the Blue Lake Trail #314 towards the Washington Pass Spires has become braided and severely eroded in many places. The fragile sub-alpine habitat is being significantly impacted by visitors attempting to explore or find a safe way up to the base of the spires. With no well-defined route, networks of paths have developed and run-off from snowmelt and thunderstorms has channeled water down these trails, further impacting the landscape.

In addition to environmental concerns, there are also safety issues that this project will address. As the climber access route continues into the alpine zone and up into approach gullies, many sections are known public safety concerns. According to the Okanogan Sheriff, there have been over 20 rescue missions in this area over the past 15 years in which Search and Rescue workers have been required to access this zone for injured users. Public usage in this area will only increase over time as climbing continues to attract more recreational users and people seek out the challenges and beauty of this amazing place.

As the first alpine trail project of its kind in Washington State, this two-year legacy project will encourage safe and sustainable recreation on and around the Washington Pass Spires. If improvement work is not done in this area, users are put at risk and the environment will be further degraded.

MVRD will use this development grant for the construction of the new trail system to provide sustainable access to the Washington Pass Spires on the west slope of Liberty Mountain. The project's goal is to build a new trail system that will address drainage, snowmelt, grade, and improve safety. Specific improvements will include constructing rock steps, drainage features, new switchbacks, and restoration of previously impacted areas. This trail would be used by about 2,500 climbers and hikers per season, with use expected to grow annually. Construction will be carried out by Access Fund trail professionals and volunteer groups with technical support from MVRD staff.

Collectively, our organizations, as well as numerous local businesses and community members in the Methow Valley, identified this project as a priority and voiced our strong support for MVRD to improve this trail network for conservation, recreation, and safety purposes. This request grew into a collaborative partnership, including input and site visits with MVRD Climbing Rangers, trail experts, local climbing guides, and nonprofits to conduct the initial in-kind trail assessment and environmental review.

In addition to our support of this RCO-NOVA proposal, our organizations are committed to seeking matching funds towards this critical RCO-NOVA proposal and recruiting hundreds of volunteers from our collective network to make this project a success.

Sincerely,

Joe Sambataro, Northwest Regional Director, Access Fund  
Eddie Espinosa, American Alpine Club  
Jason Martin, Owner, American Alpine Institute  
CB Thomas, General Manager, Goat's Beard Mountain Supplies  
Rick and Missy Leduc, Owners, The Mazama Store  
Katherine Hollis, Conservation and Recreation Manager, The Mountaineers  
Patrick Shannon, Pacific Northwest Director, National Forest Foundation  
Larry Goldie, Owner, North Cascades Mountain Guides

Erika Halm, Washington Program Director, Northwest Outward Bound School  
Ira Rushwald, President, Washington Alpine Club  
Dave Haavik, President, Washington Climbers Coalition  
Andrea Imler, Advocacy Director, Washington Trails Association  
Tom Uniack, Executive Director, Washington Wild  
Ben Greuel, Washington State Director, The Wilderness Society