

**American Rivers * American Whitewater * Audubon Washington * Conservation Northwest
The Mountaineers * National Parks Conservation Association * Washington Trails Association *
Washington Wild * The Wilderness Society**

September 16, 2022

Chief Randy Moore
United States Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave SW
Washington, DC 20250

RE: FY2024 LWCF Nomination for Washington Cascades Yakima River Watershed Project

Dear Chief Moore,

We are writing to express our support for the **FY2024 Washington Cascades Yakima River Watershed LWCF project** which would protect over 10,000 acres of private checkerboard forestlands in the Taneum watershed of the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest.

The project builds on decades of work by the conservation community and our Washington congressional delegation to resolve the checkerboard problem in the Central Cascades. Senator Murray spearheaded the I-90 Land Exchange Act in the late 1990s which authorized land exchanges to consolidate a portion of the checkerboard lands near Snoqualmie Pass. Over time, the USFS and conservation groups have continued this work, securing funding through the Land and Water Conservation Fund to further consolidate the checkerboard. While much progress has been made, we're not quite finished.

The FY2024 Washington Cascades Yakima River Watershed LWCF project represents the last phase of this decades-long effort. If fully funded at \$12 million, this project would complete the checkerboard conservation effort that was begun nearly 25 years ago. Reconnecting these last checkerboard parcels and integrating them into the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest will have lasting benefits for recreation and watershed restoration while providing for consistent landscape management.

We respectfully request your support for the full \$12 million in FY2024 in order to protect these cherished lands while we still have a chance.

Thank you in advance for your consideration. Please contact us if you have questions.

Sincerely,

Betsy Robblee
Conservation & Advocacy Director
The Mountaineers

Bridget Moran
Associate Director
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American Rivers

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