



March 25, 2026

The Honorable Patty Murray
United States Senate
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Murray:

Thanks to your leadership, Washington's national parks have received critical federal support following major disasters. We greatly appreciate your recent efforts to secure funding to replace the Hurricane Ridge Visitor Center, which will help restore an important visitor facility at Olympic National Park.

Building on that commitment to protecting Washington's parks and the communities that depend on them, the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA), along with the 12 undersigned organizations, writes to express support for \$1,675,000 in congressionally directed spending to advance the Lower Stehekin River Valley Resiliency Plan. Led by Chelan County in partnership with the National Park Service (NPS) and others, the Plan is an important effort that will help protect communities, infrastructure, and natural resources in the Lake Chelan National Recreation Area. Because all the affected infrastructure and lands are within the Lake Chelan National Recreation Area, managed by the NPS, NPS must serve as the lead decision-maker guiding this process.

The lower Stehekin River valley is a unique feature of Washington State and North Cascades National Park Complex. The lower valley is central to the visitor experience and functioning of Lake Chelan National Recreation Area and contains critical public infrastructure including the primary road system, administrative facilities, recreational sites, and roughly one hundred residences and seasonal cabins. Many of the transportation routes, including roads and trails that provide access throughout the valley, are operated and maintained by NPS. The Park Service also operates or manages many of the area's key visitor facilities and services, including the mooring marina and landing, the Golden West Visitor Center, multiple campgrounds and trailheads, the lodge, park housing and administrative buildings, and the Stehekin post office, which serves both visitors, including Pacific Crest Trail hikers, and the local community.

However, the area faces increasing risks from flooding and erosion that have intensified over the past several decades. Major flood events in 1995, 2003, 2006, and most recently 2025 have significantly altered the river channel and damaged infrastructure as hydrologic data show a shift toward more intense fall rain-on-snow flood events. While NPS developed the Stehekin River Corridor Implementation Plan in 2012, the plan did not fully anticipate the scale of current impacts. As a result, additional scientific analysis is needed to help the National Park Service and decision-makers make fully informed decisions about how to move forward with river management in Stehekin. While this funding request would support important planning work, it does not address the NPS's full funding needs to lead and participate in this process. Additional resources will be necessary to ensure the Park has the capacity to serve in that role for the public interest. We look forward to working with the NPS to better understand those needs if this funding request moves forward.

As climate change continues to alter hydrologic patterns in the North Cascades, risks are expected to grow. Without an up-to-date coordinated strategy, transportation routes, visitor facilities, and private properties in the valley will remain vulnerable to repeated damage, threatening public access and increasing long-term costs to maintain essential infrastructure.

The proposed Lower Stehekin River Valley Resiliency Plan provides a thoughtful and science-based path forward. The project will assess flood hazards, channel migration, infrastructure risks, and habitat conditions across the lower valley while bringing together Tribes, key stakeholders, and other partners to develop practical solutions.

Through a collaborative planning process, the project will evaluate risks to infrastructure and public access, analyze river processes and future flood conditions, and develop conceptual designs that improve long-term resilience for people, infrastructure, and habitat.

We strongly support funding for this effort and appreciate your leadership on issues affecting the North Cascades National Park Complex and surrounding communities. Investing in proactive planning now will help safeguard public access, protect residents, park visitors and infrastructure, and sustain the natural systems that make this landscape so spectacular.

Thank you for your continued commitment to Washington's national parks and gateway communities.

Sincerely,

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Executive Director
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Thomas O'Keefe
Director of Policy and Science
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