

December 31, 2014

Karen Taylor-Goodrich, Superintendent
ATTN: Proposed Recreation Fee Increases
North Cascade National Park
810 State Route 20
Sedro-Woolley, WA 98284

Dear Superintendent Taylor-Goodrich,

On behalf of American Whitewater, The Mountaineers and Washington Trails Association, we thank you for the opportunity to comment on North Cascades National Park's proposed recreation fee increases. We also appreciated your involvement and the information shared at the November meeting held in Seattle.

American Whitewater is a national non-profit 501(c)(3) river conservation organization founded in 1954 with over 6,000 individual members and 100 local-based affiliate clubs, representing whitewater paddlers across the nation. American Whitewater's mission is to conserve and restore America's whitewater resources and to enhance opportunities to enjoy them safely. The protection of wilderness waterways was among our founding principles. Olympic National Park is nationally recognized as a destination for backcountry paddling in a wilderness setting.

The Mountaineers, founded in 1906, is a nonprofit outdoor education, conservation, and recreation organization whose mission is "to enrich the community by helping people explore, conserve, learn about and enjoy the lands and waters of the Pacific Northwest and beyond." Based in Seattle, Washington, we have over 13,000 members and guests in seven branches throughout Western Washington. We support over 1,500 skilled volunteers who lead 3,200 outdoor education courses and activities on everything from backcountry skiing, wilderness first aid and avalanche safety to conservation education and advocacy. In addition, we provide over 4,000 opportunities for youth to get outside each year. Olympic National Park is an important 'classroom' and recreational area for our members.

Washington Trails Association was founded in 1966 and is the country's largest state-based trail maintenance and hiking advocacy non-profit organization with more than 12,500 members and more than 2.5 million unique annual website visitors. Washington Trails Association's mission is to "preserve, enhance, and promote hiking opportunities in Washington state through collaboration, education, advocacy and volunteer trail maintenance." In 2014 Washington Trails Association's 3,550 individual volunteers contributed 120,000 hours of trail maintenance on federal, state and local lands.

We understand that recreation fees, and an increase in these fees, provide an important source of funds for North Cascades National Park, especially with continual declines in agency funding. We also understand that recreation and entrance fees are important and that at least 80% of these fees go directly to the upkeep of campgrounds, trails, river access points, visitor facilities, and other worthy projects that our members benefit from.

Ideally, we would like to see Congress fund public lands appropriately so that maintenance backlogs can be reduced. In the meantime, we understand the need for increased fees, especially since it has been

almost 10 years since any National Park in Washington has increased fees. It is important for recreationists to see that access is maintained and enhanced if fees are increased. While we support an increase in user fees, we believe that this increase in revenue comes with a responsibility to ensure that the needs of all users of the National Park are being considered.

Some specific aspects of the proposed fee increase that our organizations support are:

- **Improvements in Wilderness permit system:** the development of a fee-based Wilderness reservation system is important to create simplicity of access for busy lives and the assurance of permits. We support a system like this as it improves upon the current system that requires in-person registration, which creates a barrier to access for some, while still having day-of free Wilderness permits available. With these changes, we also encourage the Park to find ways to keep overhead and administrative fees as low as possible with these processes.
- We are pleased to see that the **American the Beautiful pass will remain at \$80/year**, based on federal-level statute.
- In summary, **we support the proposed fee increases the Park has outlined.** While we believe that backcountry fees are necessary to pay for upkeep and maintenance of resources our members enjoy, we encourage the Parks to keep overhead and administration fees as low as possible, balancing increased fees with improved recreational access.

Thank you for considering our comments.

Best,

Thomas O'Keefe
Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director
American Whitewater

Martinique Grigg
Executive Director,
The Mountaineers

Andrea Imler
Advocacy Director,
Washington Trails Association