



October 7, 2016

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

To Whom It May Concern,

The Mountaineers enthusiastically endorses the Cle Elum Ranger District's RCO grant proposal to fund wilderness rangers with the purpose to contact and educate wilderness users on Leave-No-Trace and other best practices for low impact backcountry use. The Cle Elum Ranger District of the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest is one of the most popular destinations for hiking, backpacking, cross-country skiing and other wilderness activities in the Pacific Northwest. Every year, Mountaineers members frequent the District for hiking, climbing and scrambling outings and outdoor recreation skill instruction.

Unfortunately, the very crowds that are drawn to the beauty and challenge of the District's unique terrain threaten to destroy the wilderness experience they are seeking. Our members observe that recreation in the Alpine Lakes Wilderness has been drastically increasing these past few years. Popular Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest destinations such as Rampart Ridge, Rachel Lake, Spectacle Lake, Tuck and Robin Lakes and the Pacific Crest Trail are increasingly the sites of wildlife conflicts, safety incidents, and major impacts to the vegetation, soil and water quality. In order to preserve the integrity of the land as well as the experience of hikers, backpackers and other recreational users, the District must move forward with pro-active, in-field education.

The Cle Elum District's proposal follows a proven model to prevent and remediate backcountry impacts and improve safety in popular destinations. The dedicated wilderness rangers will be able to provide current and relevant information directly to the recreating public. These rangers play an integral role in identifying key problem areas so they can harness volunteer power to steward the most fragile and affected recreation sites.

The Cle Elum District's wilderness education program will provide measurable results for improving the natural features of the landscape as well as the experience of those who recreate in the District. The Mountaineers strongly supports this effort. Thank you for considering this important proposal.

Sincerely,

Katherine Hollis,

*Conservation and Advocacy Director, The Mountaineers*