



August 3, 2020

Washington State Recreation and Conservation Funding Board  
 PO Box 40917  
 Olympia, WA 98504-0917

**Re: Letter of support for WWRP Water Access #20-1259: North Fork Nooksack Water Access, Acquisition and Development**

Dear Members of the Recreation and Conservation Funding Board:

The 27 undersigned conservation, recreation and wildlife organizations are writing in support of the WWRP Water Access Grant #20-1259 for the North Fork Nooksack River.

The North Fork Nooksack River, located in Whatcom County, is known for its natural beauty and cultural resources. Flowing from Mount Baker in the Northern Cascade Range, this remarkable river is popular with boaters and paddlers who are able to use the river for a range of experiences in a pristine natural environment. Connecting from the Pacific Ocean via Bellingham Bay and the mainstem Nooksack River, the North Fork is part of the historic migratory routes for several protected salmon species. This river is also culturally important to several native people who have historically used the land and the river for thousands of years. Tribal governments such as the Nooksack Indian Tribe and Lummi Nation are actively working in the Nooksack watershed to restore the riparian forest and protect critical salmon habitat.

As identified during previous planning efforts, this project addresses a gap in public access to the North Fork Nooksack River that has caused several issues and concerns. Current access sites, Horseshoe Bend Trailhead and Welcome Bridge are 19 miles apart, a distance that is too far for day trips which is leading boaters and paddlers to establish unmanaged sites to put-in and take-out their boats to accommodate a day-trip. Illegal trespassing on public and private lands has become an issue, as it often leads to the destruction of sensitive riparian habitat and works against current efforts to restore the riparian forest in the area. One site in particular, Boulder Creek, has seen the most impacts, and is home to high-value salmon spawning habitat. User groups are also parking along the shoulder of Washington State Route 542 creating a safety issue for both vehicles driving through the area, and pedestrians loading and unloading their gear. This has become a concern of the Washington Department of Transportation who

owns and manages the state route. Establishing a managed site within this area for river access and outdoor recreation opportunities will help alleviate some of these issues and concerns.

The project has the following goals and objectives:

1. **Provide Safe and Sustainable Public Access** - This site aims to provide for safe access to outdoor recreation opportunities through the use of low-impact site interventions. The proposed project has the potential to accommodate multiple activities with facilities for boaters, anglers, and members of the general public desiring contact access to the water.
2. **Protect, Enhance, and Restore Natural Systems** - This project would provide public access while also enhancing ecological function. The site is dominated by a cleared area that has significant restoration potential. The parking area would be separated from the riverbank allowing for extensive riparian restoration of native vegetation including conifers.
3. **Increase Connections and Partnerships** - This project provides opportunities for increased connections and partnerships between the Washington Department of Natural Resources, the Whatcom Land Trust, the Nooksack Tribe, and all river users. The benefits include shared access, opportunities, and amenities.

Many of our organizations have supported sustainable recreation opportunities on Washington's public lands including the Mt. Baker Snoqualmie National Forest and within our state park system. According to the Outdoor Industry Association, each year in Washington, outdoor recreation generates \$26.2 billion in consumer spending and 200,000 direct jobs. The steady flow of visitors is critical to the economies of local communities like Glacier and other rural communities. Visitors stop to spend money on meals; buy groceries; purchase gear; sign up for paddling, horseback riding, backpacking, mountain biking, or other recreational trips; and stay overnight at hotels and vacation rentals in towns that are the gateways to our public lands.

We urge you to support the grant request for this important access site that will provide recreational, economic and safety benefits to a wild river system on the North Cascades landscape.

Sincerely,

Thomas O'Keefe  
Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director  
American Whitewater

Wendy McDermott  
Director, Rivers of Puget Sound/Columbia Basin  
American Rivers

Tom Uniack  
Executive Director  
Washington Wild

Mike McGlenn  
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Whatcom Chapter, Backcountry Horsemen of WA

Brad Throssell  
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Washington Council of Trout Unlimited

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Washington State Council Federation Flyfishers  
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