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16 July 2007

The Honorable Patty Murray
U.S. Senate
2930 Wetmore Avenue, Ste. 903
Everett, WA 98201

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
U.S. Senate
2930 Wetmore Ave., Ste. 9B
Everett, WA 98201

The Honorable Rick Larsen
U.S. House of Representatives
2930 Wetmore Ave, Ste. 9F
Everett, WA 98201

Dear Senator Murray, Senator Cantwell and Representative Larsen:

We are sending this letter to express our strong support for designation of Illabot Creek, a key tributary of the Skagit River, as part of the nation's Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

American Whitewater is a national non-profit 501(c)(3) river conservation organization founded in 1954. In Washington State American Whitewater represents approximately 3000 paddlers through our individuals members, club affiliates, and industry partners. American Whitewater's mission is to conserve and restore America's whitewater resources and to enhance opportunities to enjoy them safely. As a conservation-oriented paddling organization, American Whitewater has an interest in the rivers in the Skagit drainage. Since the passage of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 1968 we have worked to protect the nation's most outstanding rivers for the benefit and enjoyment of present and future generations—Illabot Creek is a creek of regional and national significance that should receive the high level of protection the Act provides.

Protection of Illabot Creek is a high priority for our membership given previous threats to develop this creek for hydropower. While the Skagit River system provides important hydropower resources for our region, the highest and best use of Illabot Creek is as a free-flowing tributary protected for its resource values. Organizations, resource agencies, and tribes have worked together to protect the mature riparian forest and aquatic habitat on this creek that is home to one of the largest concentrations of eagles in the lower 48 states. Permanent protection of the creek in its free-flowing condition as recommended by the Forest Service¹ is necessary to protect the significant investment the community has made in habitat protection and restoration. For our members Illabot Creek is a highlight of winter float trips on the Skagit River that provide a family-oriented wildlife-viewing experience.² Interest in this activity has increased significantly in recent years and as it continues to grow, protecting Illabot Creek is critical to maintaining the quality of this experience that draws paddlers from across the region and around

¹ Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, Land and Resource Management Plan, Final Environmental Impact Statement, June 1990 <http://www.nbii.gov/images/uploaded/154621_1158875592388_rod.pdf>

² For additional information on the section of the Skagit River that includes the confluence of Illabot Creek, see <<http://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/detail/id/2205/>>

the country. The creek itself is also known as an expert kayak run.³ The remote gorge of Illabot Creek provides a unique opportunity for exploration and adventure that has been enjoyed by our members. Few creeks provide the level of solitude that can be experienced by paddling the hidden canyons of Illabot Creek and protection of this experience is important to our membership.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue. We appreciate the opportunity to provide my comments, and hope you will support designation of Illabot Creek as part of the Wild and Scenic Rivers System. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions regarding the recreational values of this creek with respect to paddling opportunities and wildlife viewing.

Sincerely,

/s/ Thomas O'Keefe, PhD
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American Whitewater
3537 NE 87th St.
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/s/ Andree Hurley, Access Chair
Washington Kayak Club
P.O. Box 24264
Seattle, WA 98124

/s/ William Deters, President
The Mountaineers
300 Third Ave West
Seattle, WA 98119

/s/ Charles Bagley, Conservation Chair
Paddle Trails Canoe Club
P.O. Box 24932
Seattle, WA 98124

/s/ Tina Myren, Conservation Chair
Washington Recreational River Runners
330 SW 43rd St., Suite K, PMB# 501
Renton, WA 98055

/s/ Tim Leary, Owner
Seattle Raft and Kayak LLC
7777 62nd Ave NE #102
Seattle, WA 98115

³ For additional information on Illabot Creek see
<<http://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/detail/id/3526/>>