



www.americanwhitewater.org

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Re: Support for Dam Removal on Rattlesnake Creek

To Whom It May Concern,

American Whitewater is a membership-based nonprofit organization with a mission of conserving and restoring our nation's whitewater resources and enhancing opportunities to enjoy them safely. Our members are primarily conservation-oriented kayakers, canoeists, and rafters, and we have significant membership in Montana. We have had Montana-based staff since the mid-1990s, and have a depth of experience with the recreational, ecological, geological, and other values of streams in Montana. I personally lived only two blocks from Rattlesnake Creek for many years, and our current Montana representative lives adjacent to the Creek.

Lower Rattlesnake Creek offers paddlers an extremely rare opportunity to paddle a clean and beautiful class II/III creek through a major town with an easy bike shuttle. It is a unique treasure for Missoula paddlers in the spring and early summer. The ideal put-in is at the main Rattlesnake Trailhead because of its ample parking, easy public river access, and location at the upstream end of the road-accessible portion of the Creek. However, the dam lies just downstream around several bends. Paddling over the dam would pose serious risks, and the portage is long and challenging because of the fencing and dam related infrastructure. Thus, the dam blocks use on this otherwise outstanding paddling resource. Instead paddlers must put in significantly lower down the valley where parking is less optimal and the run is shorter.

The advent of small lightweight inflatable kayaks called pack rafts has made Rattlesnake Creek all the more desirable and special. People can hike or bike upstream from the main trailhead for 3 miles of outstanding class II/III paddling in a scenic undeveloped valley. Unfortunately, the dam prevents Missoula residents from connecting this experience with where they live by paddling from the National Recreation Area into town. There are very few places in the United States where a person can hike or bike into wild protected landscapes and paddle back to their house in a car-free circuit. It is part of what makes Rattlesnake Creek, and Missoula, special.

Adventurous paddlers also hike into the distant headwaters of Rattlesnake Creek from an adjacent watershed and launch five miles upstream of Franklin Bridge. They tackle the Class IV and V rapids in the upper reaches known as the Dalles,

meander through the countless beaver dams in the upper valley, and then zoom through the lower valley's rapids to the trailhead. This Wilderness adventure is then interrupted by the dam, and after making the long portage, paddlers continue to the Clark Fork River and town. It is a wonderful adventure that could only happen in Missoula, and would be much richer without the mandatory portage of the dam.

Based on our direct experience with numerous dam removals nationwide, and with Rattlesnake Creek itself, we are confident that the removal of the dam on Rattlesnake Creek would have significant benefits to fish passage, geomorphology, and recreation. Removing the dam would connect the stream's wild headwaters to the Clark Fork River and the people of Missoula. We support and strongly encourage the removal of the dam.

Sincerely,



Kevin Colburn
National Stewardship Director
American Whitewater