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February 23rd, 2021

Geoff Baran
Spills Coastal Protection Fund Grant Program Coordinator
Department of Ecology
P.O. Box 47600
Olympia, WA 98504-7600

RE: Coastal Protection Fund Grant, High Bridge Park, Wind River, WA

Dear Mr. Baran:

I am writing on behalf of American Whitewater and our interest in improving riparian habitat and addressing water quality issues on the Wind River at High Bridge Park. We enthusiastically support the grant application from Mid-Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group for a Washington Department of Ecology Coastal Protection Fund Grant to protect and restore the shoreline at this site. If funded, the grant will support the placement of boulders at High Bridge Park, locally known as the Blue Hole. This work will define parking areas and prevent users from damaging the native vegetation, shoreline, and off-roading.

American Whitewater is a national non-profit 501(c)(3) river conservation organization founded in 1954 with approximately 50,000 supporters, 6,000 dues-paying members, and 100 local-based affiliate clubs, representing whitewater enthusiasts across the nation. American Whitewater's mission is to protect and restore America's whitewater rivers and to enhance opportunities to enjoy them safely. The organization is the primary advocate for the preservation and protection of whitewater rivers throughout the United States, and connects the interests of human-powered recreational river users with ecological and science-based data to achieve the goals within its mission. Our vision is that our nation's remaining wild and free-flowing rivers stay that way, our developed rivers are restored to function and flourish, that the public has access to rivers for recreation, and that river enthusiasts are active and effective river advocates.

High Bridge Park is an important river access point for the whitewater paddling community in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. The site serves as the take-out for the

whitewater run from Stabler to High Bridge,¹ and also serves as the put-in for the run from High Bridge to the Columbia River.² The site is used by whitewater kayakers and rafters and represents one of the few locations where the public can easily access the river with a kayak or raft. Unfortunately, the area is being damaged when users drive and park on riparian vegetation and too close to the shoreline. A second, and more significant problem, is off-roading. Off-road vehicle travel is not allowed at the park, but continues to be a problem. Off-roaders have created a number of new “roads” up steep slopes above the river. These are rough and steep pathways that create significant erosion during rain events.

If funded, this grant will support Mid-Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group and Skamania County in placing large boulders at the site to close off-roading trails and prevent the pioneering of new trails. The boulders will also prevent driving and parking too close to the shoreline and protect riparian vegetation. These actions will provide streambank protection, restore riparian condition, and allow for sustainable public use of this important river access site. Collectively these efforts will result in environmental restoration and enhancement of the natural resources of the Wind River for the benefit of Washington’s citizens.

In addition to its value as a regional destination for whitewater boaters, the Wind River is an important river for wild steelhead. High Bridge Park is located within the “canyon reach,” an area with high-quality fish habitat. The boating community appreciates this free-flowing and beautiful river, and the fish and wildlife that live in and along it. We support this and other actions to protect riparian and aquatic habitat that also serve to enhance the quality of the user experience.

Thank you for your consideration of this grant proposal.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. O'Keefe', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Thomas O’Keefe, PhD
Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director

¹ American Whitewater National Whitewater Inventory, Stabler to High Bridge, <<https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/view/river-detail/2273/main>>.

² American Whitewater National Whitewater Inventory, High Bridge to Columbia, <<https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/view/river-detail/2274/main>>.