



Thomas O'Keefe
WA Regional Coordinator
3537 NE 87th St.
Seattle, WA 98115
okeefe@riversandcreeks.com

25 September 2004

Representative Rick Larsen
1529 Longworth HOB
Washington, DC 20515
Fax: (202) 225-4420

Senator Patty Murray
173 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510
Fax: (202) 224-0238

RE: Wild Sky Wilderness

Dear Representative Larsen and Senator Murray:

On behalf of the membership of American Whitewater and our affiliate clubs in Western Washington and Southwest BC (including Vancouver Kayak Club, Washington Kayak Club, University Kayak Club, PaddleTrails Canoe Club, The Mountaineers, and Washington Recreational River Runners), we wish to express our continued support for the legislation you have previously introduced as the Wild Sky Wilderness Act (H.R. 822, S. 391). Our collective membership which in this region represents over 3000 paddlers has a strong interest in the long-term future of the Skykomish River and its major tributaries. We thank you for the leadership you have shown in working to designate 106,000 acres of new wilderness in the State of Washington. The "compromise" proposed by Representative Nethercutt is simply unacceptable.

The Skykomish River is internationally renowned for its world-class whitewater opportunities for all manner of river travelers. Featuring several class 4 and 5 rapids with car-sized boulders and an average gradient of 100 feet per mile, the North Fork offers unique challenges to the expert paddler. At the same time, other sections of the river are equally accommodating to beginners and intermediate paddlers featuring breathtaking views of snow-capped Mt. Index along its tree-lined banks.

Permanently protecting the low elevation forestland on either side of this magnificent river and the tributaries that feed it is an essential step toward preserving this incredible recreational asset for current and future generations. Few places can boast this type of quality whitewater experience within an hour and a half of 2.5 million people. We have concerns that eliminating lands from wilderness consideration, particularly the 16,000 acres that Representative Pombo has proposed, would represent an unacceptable compromise and an unfortunate conclusion to the hard work invested by many individuals from our state who have long-supported this legislation. Such action would introduce too much uncertainty into the future management of these lands that represent the very heart of this legislation and the areas that our membership would most like to see protected.

We have one opportunity to do this right. We appreciate your continued commitment to full protection of the lands that have been identified in the compromise version of the bill you have previously introduced, despite attempts to undermine your hard efforts by Representatives Pombo and Nethercutt. An opportunity will come to do this right, either at the end of this session of Congress or in the next.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Thomas O'Keefe'.

cc: Representative Jay Inslee, fax (202) 226-1606