

**Testimony of Thomas O'Keefe  
On behalf of American Whitewater  
Before the Senate Committee on Ways and Means  
Work Session/Public Hearing: Natural Resources  
February 7, 2011**

Chairman Murray and members of the Committee, my name is Thomas O'Keefe, and I am a river ecologist with experience in instream flows and river-forest interactions. I currently serve as the Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director for American Whitewater.

American Whitewater is a national non-profit 501(c)(3) river conservation organization founded in 1954. 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, we have over 5000 individual members and 100 local-based affiliate clubs, representing whitewater paddlers across the nation. Through our individual members, affiliate clubs and business supporters in Washington we directly represent a population of approximately 3000 paddling enthusiasts in the state including kayakers, rafters, and canoeists.

Healthy rivers with sufficient clean and cool water sustain Washington's diverse economy. We ask a lot of our rivers:

- Washington is the leading hydroelectric power producer in the nation with hydroelectricity accounting for nearly three-fourths of electricity generation in the State,<sup>1</sup>
- Our rich soils, diverse climates and large-scale irrigation make Washington one of the most productive growing regions in the world,<sup>2</sup> and our rivers are the source of this irrigation,
- Our rivers sustain our salmon—an iconic cultural and ecological resource of significance to the region for thousands of years,
- The rivers of our state provide world-class recreation for visitors from across the country and around the world and our state is experiencing explosive growth in paddlesports with estimates of 21% growth in 10 years and 30% growth over 20 years.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, the assets our rivers provide are important to the region's employers in attracting a competitive work force

In balancing these uses and the economic benefits rivers provide we need accurate information on water quantity and quality. This is where the Department of Ecology's Water Resources programs are critically important for science, monitoring, and enforcement.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.eia.gov/cfapps/state/state\\_energy\\_profiles.cfm?sid=WA](http://www.eia.gov/cfapps/state/state_energy_profiles.cfm?sid=WA)

<sup>2</sup> <http://agr.wa.gov/AgInWa/>

<sup>3</sup> Estimates of Future Participation in Outdoor Recreation in Washington State, Washington State Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation, March 2003

As an individual who has personally participated in stakeholder negotiations regarding balancing of instream flow needs I can speak personally to the value of accurate instream flow information for decision making—we can find ways to balance different uses of our rivers but we need good data to do so and Department of Ecology Water Resources programs serve a critical role in providing it.

I am well aware that there are tough choices ahead with our state's budget. As you make these choices I want you to be aware of the importance and breadth of Department of Ecology programs such as the Water Resources program for protecting and enhancing our quality of life in this state.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today.