



Thomas O'Keefe, PhD
Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director
3537 NE 87th St.
Seattle, WA 98115
okeefe@americanwhitewater.org

Ken Salazar, Secretary of Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington DC 20240

September 12th, 2012

RE: Designated Wilderness for Thunder Creek, North Cascades National Park Complex

Dear Secretary Salazar:

We are writing to support the change in Wilderness status for the Thunder Creek Potential Wilderness Area to Designated Wilderness within the North Cascades National Park Complex. The proposal for this action is outlined in the recently published General Management Plan for the Ross Lake National Recreation Area.

American Whitewater is a national non-profit 501(c)(3) river conservation organization founded in 1954. We have over 5,500 individual members and 100 local-based affiliate clubs, representing whitewater paddlers across the nation. 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 Skagit River system and specifically Thunder Creek, which is a highly valued backcountry whitewater kayaking destination within the Ross Lake National Recreation Area in the North Cascades National Park Complex. Because high glaciers in the watershed provide late season flow, Thunder Creek represents a unique regional resource for those seeking backcountry kayaking opportunities in late summer. American Whitewater and several of our local members actively participated in the development of the management plan and we are pleased that the newly revised management plan recognizes the value of the area for paddlesports, specifically stating that "self-propelled and non-mechanized recreation will be encouraged throughout Ross Lake NRA."

While Thunder Creek has been threatened by hydropower development in the past, there is no current or future prospect of such development. With no existing or proposed uses of the river corridor that would be inconsistent with the Wilderness Act, we understand that a formal request has been made by the National Park Service to your office to designate the Thunder Creek Potential Wilderness Area as designated wilderness so the Park may manage it accordingly as part of an expanded Stephen Mather Wilderness. We write to fully support this action and request that you prioritize this important and locally supported conservation opportunity for Thunder Creek in Washington State.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. O'Keefe', written over a white background.

Thomas O'Keefe, PhD
Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director