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December 18, 2012

Senator Ron Wyden
911 NE 11th Ave, Suite 630
Portland, OR 97232

Senator Jeff Merkley
121 SW Salmon Street, Suite 1400
Portland, OR, 97204

RE: Cathedral Rock and Horse Heaven Wilderness Act of 2011 (S. 607)

Dear Senator Wyden and Senator Merkley:

We write today in support of the Cathedral Rock and Horse Heaven Wilderness Act of 2011 (S. 607) that will provide long-term conservation for lands along the John Day Wild and Scenic River.

American Whitewater is a national non-profit 501(c)(3) river conservation organization founded in 1954. We have over 5,500 members and 100 local-based affiliate clubs, representing thousands of 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 a long-standing interest in the John Day River and a significant percentage of our membership lives in the region or journeys to this river for whitewater recreation. Our members were strong supporters of the original designation of this river as a Wild and Scenic River in 1988 and we continue to be engaged in the long-term stewardship of this resource.

Of special significance to our membership, the John Day River is undammed along its entire length, and is the third longest free-flowing river in the conterminous United States. The river furnishes habitat for diverse species, including wild steelhead and Chinook salmon, while its scenic river canyons provide one of the most spectacular multi-day boating trips in the region. The proposal to consolidate federally-owned lands along the river corridor with strategic land exchanges and protection of core areas as wilderness will link federal and tribal protected areas to improve habitat connectivity, afford restoration opportunities in the ecologically important riparian corridor, and provide the recreating public with enhanced opportunities to enjoy the river by bringing additional lands along the river into public ownership. The current checkerboard ownership that alternates between public and private land represents a challenge for the recreating public as river runners are required to carry a detailed land ownership map to identify areas where camping is allowed. Perhaps most importantly this river provides excellent opportunities for families to enjoy the outdoors and experience this wild and scenic landscape. The long-term protection wilderness provides will protect this legacy for future generations.

On behalf of the community of individuals from throughout the region and across the country

who regularly recreate on this river, we thank you for your leadership in introducing this proposal. This legislation represents a great example of working with the conservation community and local landowners. The proposal represents a common-sense approach to both management issues and conservation opportunities in a manner that will protect this spectacular landscape for its ecosystem and recreation values.

Sincerely,



Thomas O'Keefe, PhD
Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director

cc:

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Oregon Whitewater Association
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Northwest Rafters Association
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Whitman College Whitewater Club
Whitman College Outdoor Program
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