

May 1st, 2020

Lynn Burditt, Area Manager
Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area
902 Wasco Avenue,
Suite 200
Hood River, OR 97031

Dear Ms. Burditt,

I am writing to ask you to consider modifying Forest Order 06-22-01-20-09,¹ the Public Closure Order for lands and facilities in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. I am specifically requesting that you consider opening the BZ Launch Area and Trail (#4413)² and Husum Day Use areas on the White Salmon Wild and Scenic River in the coming week consistent with Governor Inslee's announcement on easing of outdoor restrictions.³

Your Forest Order closing federal lands and facilities in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, and Forest Order No. 06-00-00-20-01 from the Regional Forester,⁴ were signed in March to align with state and local measures directing people to stay home to save lives. On Monday April 27th Washington Governor Inslee announced the easing of restrictions on outdoor recreation to take effect on May 5th for those activities that can be enjoyed locally with appropriate safety precautions.⁵

We have been in close contact with state agencies and the Governor's office prior to and following this announcement to discuss how whitewater boating can be enjoyed in a manner consistent with the guidance provided by the state and public health officials. We would welcome any opportunity to have a similar dialogue with federal land managers. We will be issuing guidance to our membership that to meet physical distancing guidance, paddlers will need to plan their shuttles with members from their household, use a bike, or jog.⁶ Among the rivers in Washington State, we believe the White Salmon Wild and Scenic River is an ideal river that paddlers can enjoy while practicing physical distancing

¹ https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd716508.pdf

² <https://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/crgnsa/recarea/?recid=30012>

³ <https://medium.com/wagovernor/inslee-announces-easing-of-outdoor-restrictions-8ed2c3d62050>

⁴ https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fseprd718616.pdf

⁵ <https://www.governor.wa.gov/news-media/inslee-announces-easing-outdoor-restrictions>

⁶ We discuss the recent announcement by the Governor and the implications for paddlers on the April 29th River Talk Podcast <<https://www.rivertalkpodcast.com/podcast/ep-78-talking-with-tom-okeefe-from-american-whitewater-about-river-closures-and-openings/>>

guidelines developed for outdoor recreation and adopted by agencies and organizations from across the state.⁷

We understand that maintenance of restroom facilities is a particular concern. In partnership with state agencies and other organizations representing the outdoor recreation community, we are encouraging our community to be prepared with their own water, personal hygiene products, and to carry a wag bag. We are also encouraging paddlers to stay close to home and suggesting that if you are traveling so far that you need a restroom stop, you are probably going too far. For our members living in the communities of BZ and White Salmon, who value the river as their backyard run, the ability to use and enjoy this river is important to them.

As you are likely aware, other private land owners allow access to a handful of critical access points along the White Salmon River and these sites have also been closed to the public over the past several weeks. In our conversations with those who own these primary access points, we understand they plan to make their sites available consistent with the Governor's new guidance to state agencies on May 5th. We hope the Forest Service can be aligned with this plan so we don't end up with a patchwork of policies along the length of the river that are confusing to the public and limit the ability of local residents to enjoy this special resource.

We appreciate the partnership we have had with the Forest Service over many years including our efforts with the Trust for Public Land to bring the BZ Launch Area into public ownership. We look forward to continued partnership with you and your agency as we work to open up appropriate recreational opportunities while respecting the health and safety needs that need to be considered.

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

⁷ https://www.dnr.wa.gov/rec_open