



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

June 1st, 2020

Rocklynn Culp, Town Planner
Town of Winthrop
PO Box 459
Winthrop, WA 98862-0459

RE: Mack Lloyd Park Water Access to the Methow River

Dear Ms. Culp:

On behalf of American Whitewater, I am writing in support of the Town of Winthrop's application for a WWRP Water Access Grant. Paddlesports activity and floating on the Methow River is enjoyed by area residents and visitors during the summer months but recreational infrastructure to support that use is insufficient. This proposed project would address the ongoing issues with unmanaged and unplanned access that occurs improving both user experience and ecological condition of the riparian zone.

American Whitewater is a national non-profit 501(c)(3) river conservation organization founded in 1954 with approximately 50,000 supporters, 6,000 dues-paying members, and 100 local-based affiliate clubs, representing whitewater enthusiasts across the nation. American Whitewater's mission is to protect and restore America's whitewater rivers and to enhance opportunities to enjoy them safely. The organization is the primary advocate for the preservation and protection of whitewater rivers throughout the United States, and connects the interests of human-powered recreational river users with ecological and science-based data to achieve the goals within its mission. Our vision is that our nation's remaining wild and free-flowing rivers stay that way, our developed rivers are restored to function and flourish, that the public has access to rivers for recreation, and that river enthusiasts are active and effective river advocates. Many of our members live in Okanogan County or travel to the region for the spectacular opportunities for outdoor recreation and personally enjoy the opportunities for river-based recreation the Methow River provides.

Recreation on the Methow River

The Methow River is a free-flowing river emerging from the North Cascades that provides recreational opportunities throughout the summer. The recreational value of the Methow River for paddlesports, including the entire 65 mile segment from Mazama to the confluence with the Columbia River at Pateros was documented in a series of river recreation maps developed by Wolf Bauer and published by the Washington Kayak Club from 1950 to 1965. The river is also included in A Guide to the Whitewater Rivers of Washington documenting paddling opportunities along the 75 miles from Riverbend Campground (approximately 10 miles upstream of Mazama) to Pateros (at the Columbia River confluence),¹ Paddling Washington highlighting the 10 mile reach from Winthrop to Twisp,² and Washington Whitewater that describes paddling from Winthrop and highlights the 27 mile reach from Carlton to Pateros that includes the Black Canyon.³ The Methow River is documented in American Whitewater's National Whitewater Inventory including specifically the segment from Riverbend Campground (river mile 75.5) to Carlton (river mile 27.3),⁴ Carlton to McFarland (river mile 17.8),⁵ and the Black Canyon segment from McFarland to Pateros (river mile 0).⁶ The Methow River is also one of 11 rivers featured in the 1989 book Washington's Wild Rivers where author Tim McNulty reports on a camping and hiking adventure in the headwaters and concludes, "there could be no more deserving candidate for a designated Wild River in the state."⁷

Recreational use of the Middle Methow, the approximately 10 mile reach from Winthrop (near river mile 50) to Twisp (near river mile 41), has been more extensively studied. A 2011 study, that included field work and user surveys, found that topography, accessibility from State Route 20, and its location between the two most populous towns in the area—Winthrop and Twisp—contributed to the overall popularity of the Middle Methow as a river recreation destination.⁸ Mack Lloyd Park (aka Red Barn) was found to be the most popular access point on this reach with approximately 100 users per day on weekends.⁹ This is an extremely high number for a river access site that has not been formalized for public use.

¹ Bennett, J. and T. Bennett. 1997. A Guide to the Whitewater Rivers of Washington, Second Edition: Over 300 Trips for Raft, Kayak, and Canoe Throughout the Pacific Northwest. Swiftwater Publishing Company.

² Landers, R., D. Hansen, V. Huser, and D. North. 2008. Paddling Washington. The Mountaineers, Seattle, WA.

³ North, D.A. 1999. Washington Whitewater: The 34 Best Whitewater Rivers. The Mountaineers, Seattle, WA.

⁴ <https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/detail/id/3532/>

⁵ <https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/detail/id/2164/>

⁶ <https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/detail/id/2165/>

⁷ At Page 53, McNulty, T. 1989. Washington's Wild Rivers: The Unfinished Work. The Mountaineers, Seattle, WA.

⁸ Jonason, C. 2011. Middle Methow Reach Recreational Use Assessment. Wave Trek Rescue. Prepared for Yakama Nation. <<https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/Document/view/documentid/2293/>>

⁹ Ibid.

Assessments by land management agencies have also recognized the value of the Methow River for recreation. The Methow River was identified in 1982 as one of the original segments to be included in the Nationwide Rivers Inventory (NRI) of free-flowing river segments in the United States.¹⁰ This inventory of 3400 rivers represents rivers that are believed to possess one or more “outstandingly remarkable” natural or cultural values judged to be of more than local or regional significance; recreation was specifically identified as one such value for the Methow River.¹¹ In the subsequent 1989 Wild and Scenic Rivers eligibility assessment, the Okanogan National Forest found outstandingly remarkable values of scenic, wildlife, fish, and recreation for the Methow River.¹² Specific to recreation, the Forest Service found that the segment downstream of Mazama to Carlton, that includes Winthrop, received an overall recreation rating of above average based on whitewater boating and kayaking opportunities; that portion of the river downstream from Carlton to the Columbia River confluence received an overall recreation rating of high based on whitewater boating and kayaking opportunities.¹³ The Forest Service further noted that the Methow River was one of eighteen rivers recommended for inclusion in the Washington State Scenic Rivers Program under RCW 79A.55.

Economic Benefits of Recreation

A 2015 study demonstrated the importance of outdoor recreation for the Washington State economy and found that residents recreate an average of 56 days a year outside and spend money when they do it. Residents and visitors collectively spend \$21.6 billion annually on trips and equipment purchases supporting nearly 200,000 jobs with over ⅓ of this activity occurring along water.¹⁴

This economic activity associated with outdoor recreation is significant for Okanogan County where a study found that for “nearly 96% of all survey respondents’ access to and provision of public and private recreational facilities in the Methow Valley is very important.”¹⁵ This study further found that “resident and trail user participants indicated their top three reasons or characteristics influencing decisions to move to or visit the Methow Valley are, in order of

¹⁰ <https://www.nps.gov/subjects/rivers/nationwide-rivers-inventory.htm>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Wild and Scenic Rivers Eligibility Assessment, Okanogan National Forest, Appendix G, Final Environmental Impact Statement, Land and Resource Management Plan, Okanogan National Forest, 1989, <<https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/okawen/landmanagement/planning/?cid=stelprdb5335612>>.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Briceno, T., Schundler, G. 2015. Economic Analysis of Outdoor Recreation in Washington State. Earth Economics, Tacoma, WA.

<<https://drive.google.com/file/d/0ByzlUWI76gWVR1Z4SmpIldUZyUWc/view?pref=2&pli=1>>

¹⁵ At Page vii, Economic Impacts of MVSTA Trails and Land Resources in the Methow Valley, July 2005, Prepared for Methow Valley Sport Trails Association by Resource Dimensions, Gig Harbor, WA.

<https://headwaterseconomics.org/wp-content/uploads/Trail_Study_65-methow-valley-trails.pdf>.

magnitude, 1) proximity to recreational opportunities, 2) natural beauty, and 3) rural character.”¹⁶ While a significant investment has been made in trail infrastructure over the past four decades through the work of Methow Trails, an opportunity exists to more sustainably utilize the natural water trail the Methow River provides with investment in access points. An improved access in Winthrop is among the highest priorities to address existing use and interest in the Methow River for recreation.

Need for River Access Improvements in Winthrop

Currently, Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife manages access points at Carlton, McFarland, and Pateros. Reaches of the river upstream of these managed access sites with class I and II whitewater used by kayakers, canoeists, rafters, paddleboarders, and tubers do not have well-designed river access. While access points in both Winthrop and Twisp are both well used, they are not appropriately designed for the use levels they receive and paddlers, many with a relatively low level of experience, must contend with eroding banks and challenging conditions to enter or exit the water.

An additional benefit of the proposed project is it would address the need for improved river safety information. A 2011 study by Wave Trek Rescue made the following observation and recommendation: “The current lack of signage describing river conditions and safety principles at all commonly used put in or take out points is surprising, given the current volume of potentially life threatening recreational use types. Signs and kiosks located at put in and take out points can effectively educate the public regarding the inherent risks of river running, and provide information on how recreationists can be better prepared to ensure their own safety through training and having the proper equipment.”¹⁷

The proposed project to formalize river access at Mack Lloyd Park would address a significant need of regional and statewide significance. An improved entry point to the water, restroom facilities, safety signage, and restoration of riparian vegetation would provide an enhanced user experience, improve public safety, and address ongoing resource impacts of the current unmanaged use that is occurring. This project would provide a much needed developed access to meet the needs of a wide range of recreational users, in a suitable, central location.

Conclusion

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ At Page 16, Jonason, C. 2011. Middle Methow Reach Recreational Use Assessment. Wave Trek Rescue. Prepared for Yakama Nation.

<https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/Document/view/documentid/2293/>

American Whitewater is pleased to support this project for a WWRP Water Access Grant. The project would address one of the most significant river access needs in the state on a river that has been used for river-based recreation for decades. The current infrastructure, or lack thereof, is not commensurate with the use that occurs. The proposed project will enhance the user experience and address resource impacts associated with the unmanaged use that is occurring.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. O'Keefe', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Thomas O'Keefe, PhD
Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director