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September 15th, 2020

Senator Mike Lee  
Public Lands, Forests, and Mining Subcommittee  
304 Dirksen Senate Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Ron Wyden, Ranking Member  
Public Lands, Forests, and Mining Subcommittee  
304 Dirksen Senate Building  
Washington, DC 20510

RE: Public Lands, Forests, and Mining Subcommittee Legislative Hearing Including S. 1765, Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act (Tester); S. 2828, Malheur Community Empowerment for the Owyhee Act (Wyden); S. 3427, Modernizing Access to Our Public Land Act (McSally); S. 3670, M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic River Act (Udall).

Dear Chairman Lee and Ranking Member Wyden:

On behalf of the whitewater paddling community, American Whitewater writes to express our appreciation for holding a hearing on potential new protective designations for whitewater rivers that are of value to our membership. We are tremendously pleased by, and grateful for, the Committee's work to secure the passage of the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management, and Recreation Act as well as the Great American Outdoors Act earlier this Congress; we believe the Committee has an opportunity to capitalize on the momentum of this success and work toward passage of similarly well developed legislation that protects and enhances opportunities for outdoor recreation that include whitewater paddling.

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. Our members live, work, and recreate in the states of Montana, Oregon, and New Mexico and enjoy the public lands and rivers that are included in the legislation before the Committee.

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### **S. 1765, Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act (Tester)**

American Whitewater strongly supports S. 1765, *Blackfoot Clearwater Stewardship Act* introduced by Senator Tester. This legislation would designate portions of the North Fork of the Blackfoot River and Monture Creek watersheds as Wilderness. The proposed designations would protect the outstanding whitewater paddling opportunities on both streams. The North Fork of the Blackfoot River in particular is recognized as one of Montana's premiere hike-in whitewater runs for kayakers and packrafters, featuring clear blue water, moderate rapids, and spectacular scenery. Trails up these river corridors are also primary routes used by our members to access the launching point for week-long float trips on the Wild and Scenic South Fork of the Flathead River to the north. Wilderness designation would ensure that the entire hiking or horsepacking experience into the South Fork Flathead watershed is managed in a consistent and exemplary manner. Lastly, these watersheds offer vital habitat for native fish, provide cold and clean water, and provide a scenic backdrop for the Blackfoot river downstream. American Whitewater has spent a decade exploring community support for Wild and Scenic River designations across Montana, and Monture Creek and the North Fork Blackfoot rivers have consistently been elevated for protection by a broad range of local citizens. These rivers, and their headwaters are beloved by our members and many river enthusiasts, and we support their protection with this legislation.

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### **S. 2828, Malheur Community Empowerment for the Owyhee Act (Wyden)**

American Whitewater strongly supports S. 2828, the *Malheur Community Empowerment for the Owyhee Act* introduced by Senator Wyden and co-sponsored by Senator Merkley. The Owyhee Canyonlands in southeastern Oregon is the largest intact, unprotected natural

area in the lower 48 states. This landscape is vast – over 2.5 million acres – and this legislation is both a public lands conservation bill and an economic development bill to support rural economies in the region. We appreciate the leadership of Senator Wyden in bringing unlikely allies together to find solutions on this landmark conservation bill for an incredible landscape that is important to our membership, residents of Malheur County, and the citizens of Oregon.

The legislation provides a clear mandate to the Bureau of Land Management to manage all public lands in Malheur County in ways that improve their ecological health over time. It provides a robust framework for much-needed restoration and responsive, science-driven monitoring and adaptive management. At the same time provisions in the legislation support outdoor recreation and tourism through investments that ensure economic benefits to local communities.

We strongly support Section 5(b) that would designate approximately 1,133,481 acres, as wilderness and as components of the National Wilderness Preservation System. These Owyhee Canyonlands include the surrounding landscape that the Wild and Scenic Owyhee River flows through. Floating the Owyhee River is an experience enjoyed by our members who live in Oregon and visit the state for river-based recreation. Central to that experience is the opportunity to float through a backcountry landscape with wide open country that would be permanently protected by this legislation. The legislation also provides for a more certain and wild future for over 340,000 acres of wilderness-quality lands.

Section 5(d) would add 14.7 miles of the Owyhee River to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. We support the addition of this segment and the intent to manage it accordance with section 6400 of the Bureau of Land Management Manual. We would appreciate an opportunity to work with Senator Wyden and the Committee to ensure that final legislative language reflects this intent.

We look forward to working with Senator Wyden and the Committee as this bill moves through the legislative process.

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### **S. 3427, Modernizing Access to Our Public Land Act (McSally)**

American Whitewater strongly supports S. 3427, *Modernizing Access to Our Public Land Act*, introduced by Senator McSally and co-sponsored by Senators King, Daines, Manchin, and Collins. This bipartisan bill would digitize and make publicly available geographic

information system mapping data relating to public access to Federal land and waters for outdoor recreation. Additionally this legislation would provide authorization for appropriations that are critical to implement the provisions of this legislation.

As river runners, our members routinely enjoy recreational opportunities that begin on land managed by one agency and end on land managed by another agency. Along the way it is not uncommon to float past private lands. More readily available map data will improve river management, reduce conflicts with private land owners, and help river runners understand where they can enjoy various activities on lands adjacent to rivers that are open for public use.

We appreciate that this legislation would accelerate efforts to digitize recreational access information (currently held on paper files) into geospatial files and make that recreational access information available to the public. We agree that it is essential to ensure compatibility and interoperability among applicable Federal databases. To ensure interoperability across Federal databases, we recommend that agencies adopt the U.S. Forest Service's Enterprise Data Warehouse data attribute schema for motorized and non-motorized trail uses. National Forest System Trails data are attributed into one of three data attribute subsets: Centerline, Basic, and Public Info Management. We recommend that agencies adopt the Public Info Management data attribute subset because it provides managed, accepted, and prohibited uses for motorized (e.g. four-wheel drive > 50 inches, all-terrain vehicles, motorcycles) and non-motorized trail uses (e.g. mountain biking, hiking, horseback riding).

We strongly agree that it is in the public interest to provide enhanced and expanded information about access to Federal land for recreational opportunities.

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### **S. 3670, M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic River Act (Udall)**

American Whitewater and our constituents strongly support S. 3670, the *M.H. Dutch Salmon Greater Gila Wild and Scenic Rivers Act*. This Act, introduced by Senator Udall and Senator Heinrich, will protect nearly 450 miles of high value rivers and streams, and in doing so, will boost local economies and preserve rural New Mexican communities that depend on healthy, free-flowing streams.

*All* of the rivers and streams identified in S. 3670 are free-flowing, possess Outstandingly Remarkable Values, and have immense grassroots support. This Act will protect the

outstanding recreation, scenery, geology, ecology, cultural, and historical values that exist in the Gila and San Francisco watersheds now and for future generations. With permanent protections for these important rivers and streams, sustainable outdoor recreation will continue to grow and flourish in rural New Mexico. According to the State of New Mexico's 2020 economic report, outdoor recreation generates \$1.2 billion in income and supports 33,500 jobs.<sup>1</sup> The same report found that Gross Domestic Product from nature-based outdoor recreation grew by 14% between 2012 and 2017. However, the New Mexico economy has taken a downturn due to the COVID-19 pandemic and this downturn needs to be combated with diverse economic solutions that benefit rural communities; permanently preserving river corridors that support sustainable recreation is needed now more than ever.

This Act is a culmination of years of work by Senator Udall and Senator Heinrich and numerous local champions, including elected officials, landowners, community leaders, conservationists, Tribes, business owners, sportsmen and women, and recreationists. The amount of local grassroots support sets this legislation apart and speaks volumes to the importance of these unique and special rivers and streams.

American Whitewater's constituents travel from throughout New Mexico and beyond to explore the Gila and San Francisco Rivers and their tributaries by boat. Paddling in the greater Gila watershed, whether by kayak, canoe, packraft, stand up paddleboard, or raft, allows both visitors and locals to explore the most remote and untouched areas of New Mexico. Our constituents who know and love these rivers want to see them protected now and for future generations.

We would appreciate the opportunity to work with Senator Udall and the Committee to ensure that the final legislative language meets the intent of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, protecting the free-flowing character and the Outstandingly Remarkable Values of all of the river segments in S. 3670 and not abrogating existing rights, privileges, and contracts affecting Federal lands held by any private party without their consent. Senator Udall and Senator Heinrich have already conducted extensive community engagement and public comment on the legislative language and it will be important to consider these comments for the final legislative language.

We look forward to working with Senator Udall and the Committee as this bill moves through the legislative process. We ask the subcommittee to advance S. 3670 as soon as possible.

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[https://gonm.biz/uploads/documents/publications/20HE\\_NM\\_Outdoor\\_Rec\\_Report\\_R3\\_BP\\_web.pdf](https://gonm.biz/uploads/documents/publications/20HE_NM_Outdoor_Rec_Report_R3_BP_web.pdf)

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On behalf of the whitewater paddling community, thank you again for holding this hearing, and we look forward to continuing to work with you in support of conservation and recreation values on our country's public lands and waters.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kevin Colburn". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Kevin Colburn  
National Stewardship Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Thomas O'Keefe". The signature is bold and cursive, with a prominent vertical stroke.

Thomas O'Keefe, PhD  
Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Hattie Johnson". The signature is cursive and somewhat stylized.

Hattie Johnson  
Southern Rockies Stewardship Director