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November 17th, 2020

Senator Mike Lee, Chairman
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, S. 2875, *Smith River National Recreation Area Expansion Act* (Merkley).

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 S. 2875, *Smith River National Recreation Area Expansion Act*. This legislation would afford new protective designations for whitewater rivers that are of value to our membership and protect the recreational paddling experience.

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.

About American Whitewater

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 Smith River watershed.

Support for S. 2875, Smith River National Recreation Area Expansion Act

American Whitewater strongly supports S. 2875, *Smith River National Recreation Area Expansion Act*, introduced by Senator Merkley and co-sponsored by Senators Wyden and Feintsein. The North Fork of the Smith River, originating with its headwaters in Oregon and flowing through California, is recognized as one of the nation's premiere whitewater runs, featuring clear blue water, high quality rapids, and spectacular scenery. The watershed is characterized by rare hydrologic and botanical resources, that the legislation appropriately recognizes, as well as unique opportunities for backcountry recreation.

In 1990, Congress enacted legislation to establish the Smith River National Recreation Area (NRA) to protect the watershed, but the boundary of the NRA stopped at the Oregon border, leaving the North Fork of the Smith River and its tributaries unprotected. The proposed legislation would expand the Smith River National Recreation Area by 58,000 acres protecting the diverse ecosystems of this watershed and providing consistent management for the recreational opportunities our members enjoy in this spectacular landscape. Additionally, the legislation would extend Wild and Scenic designation to the upper watershed of the North Fork of the Smith River and including its major tributaries. This would further protect one of the west coast's last free-flowing rivers and a special place for all who enjoy wild rivers.

North Fork of the Smith River and its headwater tributaries are beloved by our members and many river enthusiasts, and we support their protection with this legislation. 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 'T. O'Keefe', written in a cursive style.

Thomas O'Keefe, PhD
Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director