



North Central Washington Audubon Society
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September 26, 2023

Kristin Bail, Forest Supervisor
Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest
215 Melody Lane
Wenatchee, WA 98801
Email: Kristin.Bail@usda.gov

RE: SUPPORT FOR OWNF'S UPPER WENATCHEE PHASE 2 LWCF APPLICATION

Dear Supervisor Bail:

North Central Washington Audubon Society (NCWAS) strongly supports the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest's request for a Land and Water Conservation Fund grant to acquire the 5,959-acre Upper Wenatchee Watershed Phase 2 lands – eleven checkerboarded parcels in southern Chelan County.

NCWAS is a local chapter of the National Audubon Society, with approximately 500 members in Chelan, Douglas, Okanogan and Ferry counties. We work to enhance, protect, and restore healthy natural ecosystems and native biodiversity using science, advocacy, education, and on-the-ground conservation to promote the welfare of birds in North Central Washington.

We support your project for its many benefits. Your acquisition would protect lands identified in the 2016 Upper Wenatchee Community Lands Plan as a priority for conservation due to their high values for wildfire risk, recreation, and sustainable forestry. This plan was developed through extensive community engagement over a 20-month process and was co-led by Chelan County, Chelan-Douglas Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, and Trust for Public Land. NCWAS has been engaged in this process for many years. We enthusiastically supported Phase 1, and now strongly support Phase 2 for the same reasons.

Phase 2 would further protect habitat for numerous species including northern spotted owl, grizzly bear, gray wolf, elk, and mule deer, as well as for summer steelhead, spring Chinook, bull trout, and whitebark pine. Numerous important bird species would benefit, including northern goshawk, gray flycatcher, dusky flycatcher, Lewis' woodpecker, Clark's nutcracker, great gray owl, flammulated owl, pygmy nuthatch, and numerous other species, including sensitive plants. This project also creates the opportunity for restoration to improve both terrestrial and aquatic habitat.

Once the USFS acquires Phase 2 and eliminates its checkerboard, it sets the stage for landscape-scale restoration, complementing efforts of the USFS's Central Washington Initiative and the North Central Washington Forest Health Collaborative, a diverse group of local stakeholders representing the timber industry, conservation groups, tribal governments, elected officials, and local, state, and federal land managers. Restoration would improve forest health and reduce wildfire risk to the local communities.

Your project opens up public access to Phase 2. Birders and other recreationists would benefit from improved access. Hunters would benefit from new elk and mule deer hunting opportunities and increased access in the Shaser Creek area. Furthermore, this project would provide access to Iron Mountain and the 1.5-mile connector road through its section. Iron Mountain, a popular all-season destination for both motorized and non-motorized users, is the entry point for miles and miles of the area's trails.

Phase 2 would also support the local economy. In 2020, outdoor recreation on public lands contributed \$442.9 million to the County's economy (10.8% of the county's Gross Domestic Product), 3,081 jobs (6.7% of all county jobs), and \$29.7 million in state and local tax revenues.

Without conservation, these lands are at high risk of being developed into off-the-grid dry cabins for private recreational use due to the region's abundant natural amenities. Current zoning would allow the development of 290 twenty-acre lots on Phase 2. Such development would threaten wildlife, restoration, and recreation.

We strongly support your efforts to acquire Phase 2.

Sincerely,



Arthur Campbell
President
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cc: Scott Lynn, USFS, Northern Washington Lands Zone Lead, scott.lynn@usda.gov
Ann Welz, Trust for Public Land, Senior Project Manager, ann.welz@tpl.org