



North Central Washington Audubon Society
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October 13, 2022

Kristin Bail, Forest Supervisor
Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest
215 Melody Lane
Wenatchee, WA 98801

RE: SUPPORT FOR OWNF'S UPPER WENATCHEE WATERSHED PHASE 1 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 Phase 1 of the Upper Wenatchee Watershed Project - ten parcels, totaling 5,650-acres, intermingled with USFS lands 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.

Over the last several years, NCWAS has actively sought a way to bring these and other related properties into public ownership. Over that time, various roadblocks occurred that made eventual success often seem unlikely. Given this, we couldn't be happier to support your Upper Wenatchee Watershed Project (UWWP) and the funding now being sought for Phase 1 of it.

Our enthusiastic support is based upon the following:

- 1) Your effort would protect lands NCWAS identified through the Upper Wenatchee Community Lands Plan Process (UWCLP) as priorities for conservation. The UWCLP was developed through an extensive community engagement and data-driven process co-led by Chelan County, Chelan-Douglas Land Trust, Trust for Public Land and The Nature Conservancy. Early on, NCWAS spent approximately nine months reviewing the UWCLP parcels, assessing their habitats and current conditions, and surveying bird species present on them. In June 2016, NCWAS completed and submitted to the process

its “Recommendations for Parcel Acquisitions”. Phase 1 includes several parcels recommended by NCWAS for acquisition.

- 2) Of particular interest to NCWAS, Phase 1 includes parcels within and near the only existing northern spotted owl pair we know of in the Wenatchee/Leavenworth area. Logging on some of these parcels led, in March 2020, to our chapter petitioning the Washington State Forest Practices Board concerning the situation there and the implications it represented regarding the rules governing Spotted Owl Special Emphasis Areas throughout the State. The end result was that further logging on acreage included in Phase 1, which overlaps this Spotted Owl Special Emphasis area and its Spotted Owl Circle, ceased. Phase 1, if fully funded, will secure lands important to the continued existence of Northern Spotted Owls in this area.
- 3) Acquisition of the Phase 1 parcels would benefit wildlife and endangered plants. Specifically, it would protect habitat for important bird species including the Federally Threatened northern spotted owl as mentioned above, northern goshawk, gray flycatcher, dusky flycatcher, Lewis’s woodpecker, white-headed woodpecker, great gray owl, flammulated owl, pygmy nuthatch, and numerous other species. In addition, it would protect substantial habitat for elk, mule deer, as well as the endangered Wenatchee checkermallow and showy stickseed. If gray wolf and/or grizzly bear ultimately move into the area, these proposed acquisitions would accommodate them too. Finally, but just as important, future restoration of these lands would also help protect downstream habitat for T&E-listed Upper Columbia summer steelhead, spring Chinook, and bull trout.
- 4) Over the past many years, the fragmented land ownership pattern in the area has made application of management strategies that would better address the area’s natural values very difficult. We are confident that beginning the process of knitting the landscape together through acquisition of the Phase 1 parcels would be in the public interest and create an opportunity for enhanced landscape-scale conservation and management.
- 5) Following years of management for timber production, many of the parcels included in Phase 1 are in need of landscape scale restoration. The current public-private checkerboard ownership pattern stands in the way of addressing this goal. Fully funding Phase 1 would set the stage for implementation of much needed restoration strategies by the North Central Washington Forest Health Collaborative (NCWFHC), a diverse group of local stakeholders representing the timber industry; conservation groups; tribal governments; elected officials; and local, state, and federal land managers. Your acquisition of Phase 1 parcels would provide the NCWFHC the opportunity to begin restoring important associated watersheds, while improving forest health and reducing wildfire risk to surrounding communities.
- 6) NCWAS, as mentioned above, has focused for years on public acquisition of these and other parcels covered by TPL’s UWCLP Project. The U.S. Forest Service’s acquisition of Phase 1 parcels by late 2025 would fulfill a key milestone for Trust for Public Land (TPL) to continue its 35,000-acre purchase option agreement with the current landowners.
- 7) Last, but not least, without your acquisition, these lands will remain at risk of development into off-the-grid dry cabins for private recreational use, a threat that is very real due to the area’s abundant natural amenities. Current zoning would allow the development of 280 twenty-acre lots on the Phase 1 parcels. Such development would

prevent public access of these lands, reduce or eliminate wildlife migration/movement corridors, and prevent landscape-scale restoration.

In closing, your project, if successful, will protect the region's natural resources and wildlife habitat and create the opportunity for landscape scale conservation and restoration of the Upper Wenatchee watershed. For all the reasons cited above, we strongly support your efforts to acquire all Phase 1 parcels.

Sincerely,



Arthur Campbell

President

North Central Washington Audubon Society

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