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President Barack Obama
1600 Pennsylvania Ave.
Washington DC 20500

April 28, 2015

RE: Snake River Dam Removal

Dear President Obama:

We are writing to request your leadership in putting an end to the decades-long cycle of taxpayer waste and destruction of natural resources on the Snake River. Now is the time to breach the four lower Snake River dams. Your leadership on this issue can reallocate precious infrastructure funding to more deserving waterway projects in the Pacific Northwest and across the country.

American Whitewater is a national non-profit 501(c)(3) river conservation organization founded in 1954 with a mission to conserve and restore America's whitewater resources and to enhance opportunities to enjoy them safely. We have over 5500 individual members and 100 local-based affiliate clubs, representing whitewater paddlers across the nation. A significant percentage of American Whitewater members reside in the Pacific Northwest—a short driving distance from this watershed.

As a conservation-oriented paddling organization, American Whitewater has an interest in tributaries of the Snake River that support whitewater recreation as well as the main-stem river impacted by the dams that could support river-based recreation. In recent years regulatory agencies have imposed new restrictions on members of the public who raft and kayak on the tributaries with the goal of increasing protection for dwindling salmon runs. While we fully support efforts to protect and restore salmon populations, we are concerned that our activity is increasingly regulated while the more significant impacts of the dams remain unaddressed.

We also believe that the Snake River has significant potential to provide opportunities for river-based recreation in a region where these experiences are in such high demand that opportunities for river trips are allocated through lottery systems. When Lewis and Clark descended the lower Snake River corridor they encountered a landscape of canyon lands, deep draws, beaches, river islands and rapids. The lower Snake is the largest tributary to the Columbia swelling to 180,000 cfs in a high water year, and its rapids and whirlpools were feared and respected as hazards to be negotiated with care and attention. Many of the rapids were later named for people or features in the landscape. Names like Log Cabin Rapids, Little Pine Tree Rapids and Haunted House Rapids were common. However, with the completion of Lower Granite Dam in 1975 over fifty rapids fell silent under the still waters of the reservoirs. These went missing along with numerous river islands, beaches, river bars and riparian forests so familiar to the large rivers of the Columbia Basin and the inter-mountain west.

Today we request your leadership in initiating a dialogue that reconsiders the values that these rivers, their rapids and boat-able corridors provide. This discussion warrants a healthy, clear-eyed look at the real values of rivers and what they bring to the citizens of the Pacific Northwest in the way of long term, durable recreation benefits and quality of life. This is especially important as more people seek out places where they can enjoy clean, flowing rivers and the sporting experiences they provide.

While a water trail on the Snake River does exist, it is under-used given the minimal opportunities of multi day, non-motorized boat use of the slack water reservoirs. The Northwest Discovery Water Trail would be significantly enhanced and improved were the river once again a free-flowing asset. There can be no question that this would be a busy corridor used by kayaks, dories, and rafts if the river once again flowed, offered real access and a multitude of opportunities to interact with it in various ways and locations.

As society examines the investments of an earlier age and necessarily questions the values that each dam brings us, it is easy to see the free-flowing lower Snake River corridor as an amazing resource both economically and socially for the Pacific Northwest region.

With your leadership, we can imagine a new future for the Snake River—a future that is economically, socially, and morally sustainable.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. O'Keefe', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Thomas O'Keefe, PhD
Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director