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March 19th, 2015

David Meriwether, County Administrator
Hood River County
601 State Street
Hood River, OR 97031

RE: Punchbowl Falls Nature Park Local Government Grant Application

Dear Mr. Meriwether:

We are writing to enthusiastically support the Punchbowl Falls County Park Development and Management Plan. We are strong supporters of the effort to bring this important property into public ownership and manage it for passive recreation.

American Whitewater is a national non-profit 501(c)(3) river conservation organization founded in 1954. We have approximately 6000 individual members and 100 local-based affiliate clubs, representing thousands of whitewater paddlers across the nation. American Whitewater's mission is to conserve and restore America's whitewater resources and to enhance opportunities to enjoy them safely. As a conservation-oriented paddling organization, American Whitewater has an interest in the Hood River that supports whitewater recreation. We have over 100 members living in Hood River County who enjoy the opportunities for whitewater recreation that the Hood River provides on a regular basis.

The Hood River is a regionally significant resource that is treasured as the local paddling destination for those living in Hood River and a destination for paddlers from throughout the Columbia Gorge, Willamette Valley, and from across the Pacific Northwest. Few rivers offer the quality of whitewater that can be found on the Hood River and its two primary forks in such a scenic setting. Despite the regional significance of this river for whitewater recreation, it has very limited public access. With the exception of Tucker County Park, some marginal access within bridge right-of-ways, and Port Marina Park, the river corridor is in private ownership.

Bringing Punchbowl Falls into public ownership is one of the most important river access opportunities in the entire Pacific Northwest. In the 2013-2017 State Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan for Oregon, public access to waterways is identified as the second highest need for outdoor recreation in Hood River County. This property is critical to help address this need by serving a diverse range of user groups with year-around access. The property provides a safe take-out for those running the class IV section of the West Fork of the Hood and a put-in for those paddling the class III section downstream from the confluence of the East and West Forks. The site is critical for the public to be able to experience the Hood River as a water trail. The area around Punchbowl Falls is not only an important access point for boaters, but is

significant to the overall community. Located in a stunning canyon, it provides a sanctuary for salmon, access for fishing and swimming and has great potential for day use. In short, it is the most suitable site for a new river access point in the entire drainage and of regional significance.

Our local members were active participants in the development of the Punchbowl Falls Concept Development and Management Plan. The Advisory Committee did an excellent job of integrating input from public meetings, site visits, and a public survey. The process provided opportunities for input by a diversity of stakeholders who have an interest in this property. As illustrated by the chart on page 23 of the Plan, the property sees a variety of user groups throughout all seasons of the year.

The Plan outlines important roles for volunteers in the development of trails and long-term stewardship of the property. Our local members recognize the unique value and importance of this site. We are committed to recruiting volunteers from our organization's membership to support Hood River County in managing the site.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions regarding our community's use of this property, our interest in bringing it into public ownership, or our commitment to being a partner in long-term stewardship.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'T. O'Keefe', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Thomas O'Keefe, PhD
Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director