

May 12th, 2020

William Clem, Mayor
107 5th Street
Gold Bar, WA 98251

Dear Mayor Clem:

I am writing in regards to the current closure of Big Eddy on the Skykomish River, a site that is administered by Washington State Parks. In communicating with Washington State Parks I understand that a major factor in keeping this site closed is community concerns from Gold Bar. We are asking you to consider supporting the reopening of the Big Eddy site.

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. We have a significant membership that lives in communities along the Skykomish River, a river that has been recognized as one of the 50 Whitewater Classics of North America.¹

As you are aware, on Monday April 27th Washington Governor Inslee announced the easing of restrictions on outdoor recreation to take effect on May 5th for those activities that can be enjoyed locally with appropriate safety precautions.² We believe whitewater boating is one of the activities that can be enjoyed locally and it is important to our members living in the communities along the Skykomish River. Emerging research clearly shows that COVID-19 is largely spread through indoor transmission, with a detailed study of 380 individual outbreaks finding only one example of transmission in an outdoor environment.³

¹ Williams, Tyler, 2004, Whitewater Classics: Fifty North American Rivers Picked by the Continent's Leading Paddlers. Funhog Press.

² <https://www.governor.wa.gov/news-media/inslee-announces-easing-outdoor-restrictions>

³ <https://www.medrxiv.org/content/10.1101/2020.04.04.20053058v1>

We have been in close contact with state agencies and the Governor's office prior to and following his announcement on outdoor recreation to discuss how whitewater boating can be enjoyed in a manner consistent with the guidance provided by the state and public health officials. We recently published guidelines for how whitewater boaters can meet physical distancing guidance;⁴ in brief, paddlers will need to plan their shuttles with members from their household, use a bike, or jog.⁵ Among the rivers in Washington State, we believe the Skykomish River is an ideal river that paddlers can enjoy while practicing physical distancing guidelines developed for outdoor recreation and adopted by agencies and organizations from across the state.⁶

We understand that maintenance of restroom facilities is a particular concern. In partnership with state agencies and other organizations representing the outdoor recreation community, we are encouraging our community to be prepared with their own water, personal hygiene products, and to carry a wag bag. We are also encouraging paddlers to stay close to home and suggesting that if you are traveling so far that you need a restroom stop, you are probably going too far. For our members living in the communities along the Skykomish River, who value the river as their backyard run, the ability to use and enjoy this river is important to them.

Thank you for considering our request and please do not hesitate to contact me if you have questions about our interest in restored access to the Big Eddy recreation site.

Sincerely,



Thomas O'Keefe, PhD
Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director

⁴ <https://medium.com/american-whitewater/paddling-in-a-pandemic-keep-it-local-4de61da92f5>

⁵ We discuss the recent announcement by the Governor and the implications for paddlers on the April 29th River Talk Podcast <<https://www.rivertalkpodcast.com/podcast/ep-78-talking-with-tom-okeefe-from-american-whitewater-about-river-closures-and-openings/>>

⁶ https://www.dnr.wa.gov/rec_open