

To:

Snohomish County Council
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Everett, WA 98201
contact.council@snoco.org

County Executive Dave Somers
3000 Rockefeller Avenue M/S 407
Everett, WA 98201
Dave.Somers@co.snohomish.wa.us

Re: Letter of support for the Reconveyance of the Wild Wallace Forest to create a County Park

Dear Executive Somers and Members of the Snohomish County Council,

We, the undersigned businesses, individuals, officials, and organizations write in support of the reconveyance of 5,300 acres of forest in the Skykomish Valley for a new Snohomish County park.

Overview of Proposed Wild Wallace County Park

This area we want to protect, known locally as Wild Wallace, is forest board land managed by the DNR for Snohomish County. It contributes significant health, economic, and environmental benefits to our region. But preserving this land is an opportunity that won't come again soon. **The Department of Natural Resources is planning to log the beautiful mature forests starting in 2020.**

Wild Wallace, as a county park, with stunning mountain views, older forests, and numerous waterfalls, will make the Skykomish Valley into more of a recreational destination because it is the key piece that connects two ecological and recreational gems: the Wild Sky Wilderness to the east and Wallace Falls State Park to the west. Wild Wallace is near Gold Bar along Hwy 2, forty minutes from Everett, an hour from Seattle and Bellevue. Keeping this relatively diverse and mature forest intact also provides significant ecological benefits by protecting clean water and air and conserving and connecting wildlife habitat making southeast Snohomish County an even better place to live.

A new Snohomish County Park will provide over 25 miles of forested and view trails for families, mountain bikers, and horseback riders; with some trails ADA accessible. Wild Wallace would also create other new recreation opportunities to get people active and outside as it contains little-known waterfalls, historic sites, viewpoints, a world class bouldering area, and many potential areas for parking, campsites, and cabin rentals. Increased outdoor recreation improves physical and mental health outcomes, and community health is increasingly critical to our wellbeing. The ecological benefits of protecting the forest and the positive health effect of more trails can support the people of Snohomish County and the region both in terms of their wellbeing and their local economy.

Economic Benefits of Wild Wallace Park

A 2019 study showed that Lake Serene's 40,000 annual visitors contribute over \$834,000 to the local economy.¹ The study concludes that creating more trails, especially when those trails connect to existing trails such as at Wild Wallace, promotes multi-day trips and even greater economic benefits.

¹ <https://rco.wa.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/HikingBikingStudy.pdf>

A recent survey of visitors to Wallace Falls State Park showed that 42% planned to shop or dine locally. With over 225,000 visitors per year, this means that users spending in the \$25 to \$50 range contribute \$2.36 million to \$4.73 million in revenue to the Skykomish Valley each year.

With two trailheads, additional parking, and over 20 more miles of trail, Wild Wallace would take the pressure off of overcrowded Wallace Falls State Park and would bring new revenue to the Skykomish Valley.

Wild Wallace Park Fulfills Snohomish County's Stated Goals

Wild Wallace would fulfill Snohomish County's goals for Parks and Recreation as stated in Snohomish County's Comprehensive Plan. **The Gold Bar urban growth area is specifically mentioned for potential acquisitions for parks due to lack of nearby county and city parks.** Recreation opportunities in Wild Wallace will help meet the county's future level of service goals for trails for multiple user groups, camping and other types of outdoor recreation.

In addition to multiple sites of interest, it provides additional parking and an alternate access route to overcrowded Wallace Falls State Park. People from around the region will travel to visit Wild Wallace.

Trails could connect to Wallace Falls State Park from the east, providing new eastern views of the waterfall corridor and access to the Wild Sky Wilderness, Forks of the Sky State Park, and more. **Wild Wallace could become a major component of Snohomish County's designated Sky Valley Recreation Corridor**, and act as a hub for the future Wild Sky Community Trails and regional trails connections to the Centennial Trail, Snoqualmie Valley Trail and up to Stevens Pass.

Snohomish County's General Policy Plan also recommends acquisition or development of new parks as appropriate, including "unique unanticipated opportunities." Reconveyance of DNR-managed county forest board land is certainly one of those opportunities, as opposed to purchasing land at market prices.

Reconveyance of the Land: A New Park at a Bargain

Snohomish County does not have to buy the land for Wild Wallace County Park. A majority of the 5-member Snohomish County Council can vote to have the land reconveyed back to the County.

Reconveyance is a state law that allows a county to regain control of their own forest board land from the state, as long as the County decides to use the land as a park. When the land is reconveyed there is no cost for the acreage, just the administrative costs of land transfer. There will be a loss of forest revenue and we look forward to being part of that solution once that is quantified.

Having the land reconveyed for a park simply requires a majority vote from the Snohomish County Council, along with an approved park plan. This system was used to create the popular 8,400-acre Lake Whatcom park in Whatcom County and to create other parks in Snohomish County and elsewhere.

Your Support Is Urgently Needed

The proposed Wild Wallace County Park area is threatened by heavy logging that will soon eliminate this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

The Department of Natural Resources is planning to log significant portions of forest around Wallace Falls State Park in 2020 and 2021, essentially exporting Gold Bar's resources for a one-time windfall, leaving us with clearcut hillsides for decades to come.

As the City of Gold Bar stated in its December 2019 Resolution, the economic future of the Skykomish River Valley lies in tourism and outdoor recreation. This means that preserving forested trails and wildlife habitat is a crucial part of preserving our economic future. This new county park will draw people from around the region, help Snohomish County compete with neighboring counties for recreation based tourism, and will provide local residents with much-needed trails for hiking, mountain biking, horseback riding, climbing, and other recreational activities.

Proposal to the Snohomish County Council and Snohomish County Executive Dave Somers:

We urge you to immediately reconvey this 5,300 acre area in Snohomish County to create Wild Wallace County Park before this opportunity is lost for generations. Thank you for your consideration of this important request.

Sincerely,

The Undersigned Businesses, Organizations, and Individuals

Businesses:

Big Bear Adventures LLC

Gold Bar Market

Hard Core Paddles LLC

Wild Sky Escape

Riverside Retreat

Wander Bigger Running LLC

Rocky's Retreat

Peace Love Yoga

AVS Engineering

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Nash and Nash Ventures LLC

Mountain to Sound Outfitters

Inkblot Collective LLC

Three Streams Productions

Pistil Books

Filling the Frame Photography

Sky Mountain Experience

Espresso Chalet

Politicians and Political Groups:

Bill Clem – City of Gold Bar Mayor

Demi Phillips – City of Gold Bar Council Position 1

Steven Yarbrough – City of Gold Bar Council Position 2
Kendall Wallace – City of Gold Bar Council Position 4
Jordan Sears – City of Gold Bar Council Position 5
League of Women Voters of Snohomish County
Washington State Federation of Democratic Women, Salish Sea Chapter

Organizations:

American Whitewater
Friends of Heybrook Ridge
Snohomish/Island County Sierra Club
Pilchuck Audubon Society
Alpine Lakes Protection Society
Sky Valley Future
Wild Sky Community Trail Association
Skykomish Valley Environmental and Economic Alliance

Individuals:

Over 2,900 individuals, businesses, and organizations have signed in opposition to the logging of this area of Reiter Foothills Forest and in support of the proposal for the reconveyance to preserve the land by making it a public park.