



October 29, 2024

Recreation and Conservation Office
P.O. Box 40917
Olympia, Washington 98504-0917

RE: Support for grant applications:

- **NOVA 24-2451 CLE ELUM RD ALPINE LAKES WILDERNESS E&E 2026-2027**
- **NOVA 24-2455 CLE ELUM RD NON MOTORIZED TRAIL M&O 2026-2027**
- **Cle Elum RD Frontcountry E&E 2026-2027: 24-2456 Edu NOVA - Education and Enforcement**
- **Cle Elum RD Frontcountry M&O 2026-2027: 24-2457 Maint NOVA - Nonhighway Road Maintenance (dispersed areas and trailheads)**

Dear evaluation committee members,

The Mountaineers enthusiastically endorses the Cle Elum Ranger District's RCO grant proposals to fund wilderness rangers and trail and road maintenance.

The Mountaineers, based in Seattle, Washington and founded in 1906, is a nonprofit outdoor education, conservation, and recreation organization whose mission is "to enrich the community by helping people explore, conserve, learn about and enjoy the lands and waters of the Pacific Northwest and beyond." 1,200 skilled volunteers lead 3,200 outdoor education trips and courses annually for 16,000+ members. Our youth programs provide over 15,000 opportunities each year for children to get outside. We are a passionate, engaged, and knowledgeable community that cares about the outdoors, and protects the outdoor experience for current and future generations.

The Cle Elum Ranger District of the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest is one of the most popular destinations for hiking, backpacking, cross-country skiing and other wilderness activities in the Pacific Northwest. Every year, Mountaineers members frequent the District for hiking, climbing and scrambling outings, and outdoor recreation skill instruction.

At The Mountaineers, we experience increased interest in our courses and activities every year, as our region experiences continued population growth. Unfortunately, the very crowds that are drawn to the beauty and challenge of the District's unique terrain threaten to destroy the Wilderness experience they are seeking. Our members observe that recreation in the Alpine Lakes Wilderness has been drastically increasing these past few years. Popular Okanogan-



Wenatchee National Forest destinations such as Rampart Ridge, Rachel Lake, Spectacle Lake, Tuck and Robin Lakes, Jade and Marmot Lakes, and the Pacific Crest Trail are increasingly the sites of wildlife conflicts, safety incidents, and major impacts to the vegetation, soil and water quality. In order to preserve the integrity of the land as well as the experience of hikers, backpackers and other recreational users, we strongly support the District's RCO grant applications.

The Cle Elum District's education and enforcement proposal follows a proven model to prevent and remediate backcountry impacts and improve safety in popular destinations. The dedicated wilderness rangers will be able to provide direct education to wilderness users on Leave No Trace and other best practices for low-impact backcountry use. These rangers play an integral role in identifying key problem areas so they can harness volunteer power to steward the most fragile and affected recreation sites. The Cle Elum District's wilderness education program will provide measurable results for improving the natural features of the landscape as well as the experience of those who recreate in the District. These educational efforts are also critical in addressing increasing tribal concerns with recreation impacts on their sovereign and inherent rights, including treaty rights.

We also strongly support the Cle Elum Ranger District's grant application for non-motorized trail maintenance. It is critically important to regularly maintain trails to withstand the increased recreational use and protect fragile ecosystems. As you know, federal funding for the U.S. Forest Service has decreased over time and is no longer able to support dedicated trail maintenance crews. This grant funding is essential for the Cle Elum District to continue to maintain beloved and well-used trails. Without this support, trails that Mountaineers and other recreationists use could fall into disrepair.

Finally, we fully support the Cle Elum Ranger District's grant application for nonhighway road maintenance. It is critical that roads leading to dispersed camping opportunities and trailheads are maintained to preserve and encourage recreation access to these areas. This grant funding would ensure safe and reliable access to popular trails and camping opportunities for current and future generations of recreationists.

Thank you for considering these important proposals, and thank you for your work on behalf of Washington's natural landscapes and recreating public.

Sincerely,



**THE
MOUNTAINEERS**

7700 Sand Point Way NE
Seattle, WA 98115

www.mountaineers.org

Betsy Robblee
Conservation & Advocacy Director
betsyr@mountaineers.org