

# **AGREEMENT REGARDING ESTABLISHING NEW ROCK CLIMBING ROUTES IN THE SKAGIT GORGE AREA, ROSS LAKE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA, PENDING COMPLETION OF THE GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN**

This document describes the agreement reached between the Washington Climbers Coalition<sup>1</sup> (“WCC”) and the National Park Service (“NPS”) regarding the establishment of new rock climbing routes in the Skagit Gorge area of the Ross Lake National Recreation Area (“NRA”) pending an update to the NRA’s General Management Plan.

## **BACKGROUND**

The NRA is administered by the NPS as part of the North Cascades National Park complex. The NPS recognizes that rock climbing and the establishment of climbing routes is a legitimate historic and present day use of public lands included in the Ross Lake NRA and North Cascades National Park. The area of the NRA adjacent to Highway 20 between the towns of Newhalem and Diablo (the “Skagit Gorge”) contains many cliff faces and boulders appealing to rock climbers. Note that climbers of this area are forewarned about the traffic hazards involved in accessing this area and do so at their own risk.

Prior to 2002, climbers began establishing rock climbing and bouldering routes in the Skagit Gorge. Due to significant resource damage caused by climbers clearing vegetation to boulder and to allow the NPS the opportunity to develop and implement a climbing management plan for the NRA, climbers agreed to a voluntary moratorium on establishing new climbing and bouldering routes in 2002. Climbers agreed to this voluntary moratorium with the understanding that a climbing management plan would be implemented within 2 years.

After climbers agreed to the voluntary moratorium, several unforeseeable events occurred that delayed implementation of a climbing management plan for years beyond the original two-year expectation. As of late 2007, a climbing management plan has still not been developed. The NPS now plans to address front country climbing within the context of a general management plan (“GMP”) for the entire NRA. This GMP may not be completed until 2010.

In light of this delay, the NPS has waived the voluntary moratorium on new climbing routes on NPS lands at specific sites referenced in this document. However this does not lift the moratorium on establishing new bouldering sites in the Skagit Gorge and elsewhere. The WCC and the climbing community are expected to abide by this voluntary moratorium on new

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<sup>1</sup> The WCC is a non-profit advocacy organization dedicated to preserving and enhancing access to Washington climbing resources. It represents Washington climbers in discussions with public and private land managers, educates climbers on resource preservation and stewardship, and organizes public service projects such as cleanup of climbing areas. The WCC is the Washington affiliate of the Access Fund, a national advocacy organization devoted to climbing access issues.

bouldering sites. Specifically, the NPS has recognized new climbing routes at two cliff areas within the Skagit Gorge and one area on NPS owned land in the town of Newhalem. These cliff areas within the Skagit Gorge are both immediately adjacent to Highway 20, with already-established climbing routes and ongoing visitation by climbers. The cliff area in the town of Newhalem sits back from a parking lot off Highway 20. On September 28, 2007, NPS and WCC toured these cliffs to assess existing conditions and potential impacts.

Based on the foregoing, the NPS agrees that until the GMP is complete or further direction is given by the NPS, new routes may be developed as described below providing the established Climbing “leave no trace” ethics are followed as referenced in the “Leave No Trace, Outdoor Skills and Ethics, Rock Climbing” booklet produced by NOLS. This would include using dull or painted or camouflage bolt hangers and working to limit proliferation of access trails. These climbing areas will be monitored by NPS staff for resource damage and are subject to closure if “leave no trace” ethics are not followed or unacceptable resource damage is identified.

1. **New climbing routes may be established at the Diablo Crag and Newhalem Crag and Town Crag.** The WCC and the NPS agree that the voluntary moratorium on the establishment of new climbing routes at the cliff areas described below is dissolved effective immediately. Climbers may immediately begin establishing new routes at these cliffs, within the parameters described in Paragraph 2 below. This agreement does not apply to the establishment of new bouldering sites within the Skagit Gorge. Note that future attachments will be added to this agreement and posted on the WCC website to more clearly show climbing locations.

A. **The Diablo Crag.** The Diablo Crag sits at the “Y” intersection where Highway 20 and the road to the town of Diablo split. The crag itself is approximately 20 meters north of Highway 20, to the west of the above intersection. There is an established parking area on the north side of Highway 20, from which climbers can easily walk to the crag. Attachment A to this Agreement is a photograph taken from Highway 20 that shows the crag.

B. **The Newhalem Crag.** The Newhalem Crag sits outside the town of Newhalem, along Highway 20, beginning approximately 0.1 miles northeast of the parking lot for the Gorge Dam powerhouse footbridge. The crag is roughly divided into eastern and western sectors. The western sector (“Newhalem West”) runs from the large crack approximately 10 meters west of the westernmost-developed climbing route on the crag, east to a large drainage gully that separates the two cliffs. The eastern sector (“Newhalem East”) runs from where the cliff begins, east of the gully, to the prominent triangular roof (approximately 10 meters horizontal) located on the eastern portion of the cliff, approximately 50 meters up the cliff face. The low angle base of the western edge of the ‘Newhalem East’ is covered with moss and is off limits to bouldering or climbing. Attachment B to this Agreement includes photographs that show the boundaries of the Newhalem Crag. Attachment C to this Agreement shows in detail the large crack that forms the western boundary of Newhalem West. Newhalem West has a long-established access path from Highway 20 directly to the cliff base. Access to Newhalem East has generally been from the gully or via a faint trail from Highway 20. The WCC has agreed to establish and maintain a clearly marked access trail as directed by the NPS from Highway 20 directly to the base of Newhalem East and to discourage climbers from approaching the cliff from other directions to reduce erosion and resource impacts.

C. **The Town Craggs.** The Town Craggs are the cliffs located off Highway 20 in the Town of Newhalem. Attachment D to this Agreement includes an aerial photograph showing the Town Craggs. The area highlighted in yellow<sup>2</sup> is land owned by Seattle City Light, and is not within the NPS' jurisdiction. All other lands shown on Attachment D are NPS land and subject to this agreement.

2. **New climbing route establishment.** Establishing new routes may include installing fixed climbing protection, such as bolts and/or pitons, on the cliffs. The NPS understands that the use of fixed anchors such as expansion bolts and pitons on rock climbing routes is a legitimate and acceptable practice and that the use of fixed anchors is often necessary for safe climbing but expect that climbers use low impact techniques when establishing new routes. When placing fixed anchors, climbers should limit their impact by all reasonable means. All fixed anchors should be camouflaged or painted to further reduce their minimal visual impact. Climbers should use fixed anchors to facilitate roped descent from climbing routes to minimize impacts on cliff top soils and vegetation. Climbers are expected to minimize any resource impacts and follow established "leave no trace" standards. Climbers are not to leave fixed ropes over night. Climbers should minimize erosion and networks of multiple trails to access the cliffs and climbing routes.

3. **The voluntary moratorium on establishment of new climbing and bouldering routes will continue in other park areas.** The NPS expects that until such time as the GMP is completed climbers will continue respecting the voluntary moratorium on establishing new climbing and bouldering sites in all other areas within the Skagit Gorge and the NRA.<sup>3</sup> The NPS is now and will continue to enforce regulations designated to protect natural resources that are at risk from bouldering and route development activities in all areas within the Skagit Gorge, the NRA and North Cascades National Park Complex.

4. **Climber education.** WCC will post a link to this agreement on its website. In the area of the website devoted to the Skagit Gorge climbing area, the website will state that "the voluntary moratorium on the establishment of new climbing areas is lifted at specific sites in the Skagit Gorge as described but continues to apply elsewhere." It will also mention that the moratorium on establishing new bouldering sites will continue until completion of the General Management Plan at which time this moratorium will be re-examined by the NPS. The WCC agrees to post the information set forth in paragraph 2, *supra*, regarding the responsible establishment of new routes and to continue to use the WCC website to educate climbers and to promote responsible and low impact climbing practices. The WCC agrees to post information on its website regarding the need for extreme caution while walking along Highway 20 while approaching climbing areas and to walk behind guardrails where feasible. In addition, the WCC

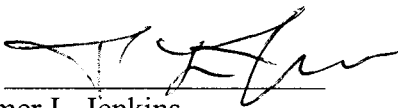
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<sup>2</sup> If copies of Attachment D are in black and white, the area owned by Seattle City Light is represented by the area shaded the same color as that in which the Town of Newhalem buildings sit.

<sup>3</sup> The WCC and the NPS acknowledge that the WCC has no authority to bind individuals to this Agreement, however the NPS maintains the authority to close any area of the park to climbing if needed.

agrees to use its best efforts to obtain volunteers to undertake periodic cleanup (including trash removal) and maintenance of the crags and the areas surrounding crags.

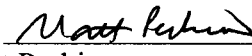
National Park Service

By:   
Palmer L. Jenkins  
Superintendent  
North Cascades National Park Complex

3/10/09

Date

Washington Climbers Coalition

By:   
Matt Perkins  
Secretary  
Washington Climbers Coalition

5/9/08  
Date