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September 28, 2010

Tom Teigen  
Snohomish County Parks  
6705 Puget Park Drive  
Snohomish WA 98296

Dear Mr. Teigen,

We are writing to express the interest of our organization in the White Horse Trail that runs along the North Fork of the Stillaguamish River. The river itself has been recognized as a water trail used by local paddlers since at least the early 1960's. As you develop this trail we request that you consider provisions to improve access for river users.

American Whitewater is a national non-profit 501(c)(3) river conservation organization founded in 1954. We have over 6,000 members and 100 local-based affiliate clubs, representing 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 North Fork Stillaguamish River. A significant percentage of American Whitewater members reside in Western Washington—a short driving distance from this river for recreation.

The North Fork Stillaguamish River has been a well-known paddling destination for the last several decades used by our local members, affiliate clubs, and the general public. We understand that the Whitehorse Trail will ultimately consist of a 27 mile long corridor from Arlington to Darrington that parallels the river. We know that you have been working to secure resources to make the old bridges safe for pedestrians and acquire critical land to provide trailheads and other facilities. As you develop the plan for this corridor we ask that you also consider opportunities to improve and enhance river access. While there are several sites where the public accesses the river, few of these sites have adequate or clearly defined parking, sanitation facilities are lacking, and social trails to the river are poorly defined with associated safety issues and resource impacts. We believe that facilities to access the trail can be entirely compatible with facilities to access the river and we request that you seek opportunities to meet this dual interest as you proceed forward with design work and construction.

We would welcome and opportunity to further discuss river access as part of the overall trail project and would like to work with you and your staff to help support future funding requests for project implementation. I have enclosed a copy of the river description contained within our National Whitewater Inventory, a database of more than 6000 whitewater runs across the nation. We look forward to working with you in

promoting completion of the Whitehorse Trail and providing facilities that accommodate the wide spectrum of current and future public recreational use of this river corridor.

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

cc: James Yap

Enclosure:

River Description of the North Fork Stillaguamish River from American Whitewater's National Whitewater Inventory.



**National Whitewater Inventory: North Fork Stillaguamish River**  
<http://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/detail/id/2237/>

**Stillaguamish, N. Fork, Washington, US**

**2. Moose Creek to Oso**

**Usual Difficulty: II** (for normal flows)

**Length: 25.7 Miles**



*Hazel Hole*

*Photo by Thomas O'Keefe © taken 10/14/07*

#### **Gauge Information**

**NF STILLAGUAMISH RIVER NEAR ARLINGTON, WA**

Name: usgs-12167000

Range: 1000 - 2500 cfs

Difficulty: II

#### **River Description**

The North Fork of the Stillaguamish is perhaps better known for its steelhead than its whitewater but it's still a great float trip with plenty of opportunities for viewing wildlife and the legacy of geologic processes that shaped the Puget Sound lowlands. It has been popular with experienced canoeists for years.

The North Fork of the Stillaguamish has a fascinating geologic history and was once a much bigger river as it carried the waters of the Suiattle and Sauk Rivers. During the last glacial advance the mouth of the Puget Sound rivers were blocked by the Puget Lobe of the Cordilleran ice sheet and outwash gravel from the glacier formed a dam creating a lake fed by the Skagit, Suiattle, and Sauk Rivers. The lake eventually overtopped the dam

near Darrington, draining through what is now the North Fork Stillaguamish valley. Following the retreat of the ice sheet the Skagit River broke through the gravel dam towards the north end of the lake and reestablished it's current course while the Sauk and Suiattle continued to flow along the course of the North Fork Stillaguamish. Volcanic eruptions of Glacier Peak in the Sauk and Suiattle headwaters that followed the last glacial advance choked the rivers with volcanic debris forming an alluvial fan at Darrington that now diverts both of these rivers north to the Skagit River.

All this geologic activity has created the features that paddlers experience today. The run starts out on a narrow river with exceptionally clear water draining more resistant bedrock to the north. At moderate flows, intermittent rapids are relatively straight forward class II formed by small boulders. For the most part however this section is characterized by swift current that cuts through gravel bars and the primary hazard to be aware of is wood. Although the forests have been logged, a canopy of alders, cottonwoods, and a few conifers has grown up along the river. Over the first few miles you should be prepared to portage a time or two.

As you pass the Swede Heaven Road Bridge, the river begins to open up a bit more. Wood hazards become less of an issue but may still be present. You will also start to encounter more homes along the river although much of the river remains lined by young forest. Throughout this section you will be treated to impressive views of the nearby mountains and ridges if you happen to be out on a clear day. If it's an overcast day in the middle of January you can expect to see dozens of eagles who come to feast on the river's coho salmon. There are a couple straight forward class II rapids representing the legacy of past glacial activity and the power of the much larger river that once flowed through this valley. For the most part however the run consists of navigating the swift currents and avoiding the occasional wood hazard. At one time this river would have had much more wood and experimental engineered log jams were first constructed on this river in 1998 in the vicinity of Hazel Hole.

As you continue on downstream past Hazel Hole and towards the C Post Road Bridge, you will start to see the river begin to cut through more clay, silt, and sand deposits of glacial and lake origin that are the main source of significant sediment production in this watershed. The water becomes a lot more cloudy in stark contrast to the crystal clear waters at the put-in. You will also notice the increase in river volume in this section and a couple more class II rapids will be a bit more filled in resulting in the best rapids on the run. As you pass through a constrained section of the river you will soon emerge near the Whitman Road Bridge.

Continuing downstream the river flows through at least one more class II rapid before it begins to wind back and forth across the floodplain. You will pass Deer Creek which comes in from river right, a challenging class V run famous for it's summer steelhead. All along the run there are gravel bars that make great stops for a picnic lunch.

Downstream of Cicero it would be a stretch to call the rest of the run whitewater, but you can continue all the way to the confluence with the South Fork in downtown Arlington.

## **Logistics**

There are a couple different access points for the North Fork Stillaguamish depending on what you're looking for. This section is typically divided into an upper and lower run divided by the access at Whitman Road.

### *River Mile 0 (Haller Park) Arlington*

This access is located right at the confluence of the North and South Forks in Arlington at the park located on the upstream river left side of the Highway 9 Bridge adjacent to the sewage treatment plant.

### *River Mile 9.5 (Monty Road)*

This is the typical take-out for the lower run. From Arlington head east on Highway 530 about 7.5 miles and turn north onto Monty Road at Highway 530 mile 28.8 just before it crosses the river. The access is downstream river left of the Highway 530 Bridge and this is the take-out for the lower run.

### *River Mile 17.6 (Whitman Road)*

To reach the popular intermediate access continue upstream and at mile 35.0 turn north onto Whitman Road. The access is at the Whitman Road Bridge on downstream river left and there is a good trail to the river under the bridge.

### *River Mile 21.2 (C Post Road)*

Access here would be a bit of a scramble but it is possible. At Highway 530 mile 37.8 turn north onto C Post Road and 0.4 miles from the highway you'll come to single-lane bridge across the river.

### *River Mile 22.4 (Hazel Hole)*

This is more typically used as a fishing access, but it's a convenient pullout right along Highway 530 at mile 38.8. An interpretive kiosk here describes the history of steelhead fishing on this river.

### *River Mile 30.0 (Swede Heaven Road Bridge)*

This access is a good put-in option for the upper section when flows are below 1500 cfs. The river is also more open downstream of this bridge. To reach this site turn north onto Swede Heaven Road at Highway 530 mile 43.7 (directly across from the Shell Station) and continue 0.8 miles to the river. Parking is limited but there is a convenient access to the river on the upstream river left side of the bridge.

*River Mile 32.0 (Forest Road Bridge)*

To reach the put-in for the upper section continue upstream to Highway 530 mile 46.8 and turn onto an unmarked road (it's easy to miss this turn). Continue past the Darrington Substation and 1 mile from the highway you'll reach a bridge with convenient access on downstream river left. Above this bridge there are reports of more challenging whitewater upstream.

The river is paralleled by Highway 530 along its entire length, so the shuttle logistics are relatively simple. Someday completion of the Whitehorse Trail that follows the old railroad grade along the river will provide an inviting bike shuttle option. The grocery store in Arlington located a couple blocks east of the Highway 530 and Highway 9 junction is a popular meeting spot and good place to load up on any snacks or provisions you want for your trip. Nearby camping can be found in the National Forest. Just continue east through Darrington and up the Sauk River on the Mountain Loop Highway (Clear Creek Campground is located at Mountain Loop Highway mile 51).

**Detailed Information**

**County:** Snohomish

**Zipcode:** 98223

**Putin Lon:** -121.703

**Putin Lat:** 48.2802

**Takeout Lon:** 121.91

**Takeout Lat:** 48.2738

**USGS HUC:** 17110008