

Middle Fork Snoqualmie River Access Project



a proposal submitted to the
National Park Service RTCA program
<<http://www.nps.gov/rtca>>

30 June 2003

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Project Description and Resource Importance

Introduction

One of the most significant outdoor recreation areas close to metropolitan Seattle is the Middle Fork of the Snoqualmie River. Less than an hour drive from downtown, the valley is accessible to a population of over three million people and attracts visitors from across the country. The river feels remote as it winds through a forested river valley largely in public ownership and has been proposed for designation as a *Wild and Scenic River* by the U.S. Forest Service. A diversity of recreational opportunities are pursued within the boundaries of the watershed.

The Snoqualmie River itself is popular for whitewater recreation and provides the closest intermediate whitewater to the greater Seattle area. With over 40 miles of whitewater, the river and its tributaries serve a wide range of skill levels with some sections suitable for beginners and others that challenge the nation's top experts. The best known section is called the "Middle-Middle" that extends from the Dorothy Lake Road bridge downstream to an access point off SE Tanner Road in North Bend.

For local paddlers, the 7.6 mile Middle-Middle run is a popular "escape" that can be paddled on weekday evenings particularly during late spring when the river is fed by snowmelt from the Western Cascades. The river is also popular throughout the rainy season when winter storms provide ample flows for whitewater boating. In addition to many of the region's paddlers who consider this river their local run, the Middle-Middle attracts paddlers from across the country who come to sample the region's rich outdoor recreational resources.

Need for Improved Public Access

The quality of this river as a recreational resource is significant, however, only a few informal access points exist along public land that adjoins the river. Formal public access has never been provided. We now have a significant opportunity for a group such as American Whitewater to develop a partnership with a local government agency to improve the current situation.

Improvements to create formal access points will address erosion issues, and provide simple improvements to the sites to facilitate the launching of heavy and cumbersome craft, such as rafts and canoes. Improvements will address existing and potential future conflicts with private property owners that live next to currently used informal access points. Formal public access points will also provide designated entry points with relevant interpretive and safety information.

With the goal of creating formal access points, two sites have been purchased by King County and identified as future public river access. These sites include Granite Creek Flats¹, (aka Concrete Bridge or Dorothy Lake Road Bridge) which is located between river mile 56 and 57 and Tanner Landing². (aka North Bend River Park) which is located upstream of river mile 48. King County owns the sites but has not developed a concept plan for them due to limited development funds.

The Granite Creek Flats site was acquired through King County's Waterways 2000 Program that authorized acquisition and protection of riparian habitat. A River Corridor Public Use Concept plan, funded by the State of Washington's Interagency Committee for Outdoor Recreation (IAC), and released in 1997, recommends this site for day-use recreation and easy foot and boat access to the river. It was historically used for this purpose before modifications to the road and river access trail made public access uninviting and a challenge. The boating public's vision for a formal access site is consistent with the goals of the Waterways 2000 program.

Tanner Landing was purchased by King County in spring 2003 for use as a potential take-out for the Middle-Middle. It also serves as a put-in for a beginner-training run known as the "Club Stretch."

¹ Located at UTM CONUS NAD27, 10T, 0602391E 5260875N

² Located at UTM CONUS NAD27, 10T, 0594145E 5259397N

Paddlers currently use a shoreline access approximately 1/2 mile upstream along a King County right-of-way off Tanner Road. Increased housing density along this road has resulted in the loss of convenient raft access. Because the sports of kayaking, canoeing, and rafting have greatly increased in popularity over the last decade, private property concerns have increased with greater use of the site by increasing numbers of paddlers. The River Corridor Public Use Concept plan calls for car and bike parking at the new Tanner Landing site, information and interpretive signs, a connection to the Snoqualmie Valley Trail, toilet facilities and public river access. Opening this site to the public requires construction of an access road from existing public roadways to the property.

Proposed Paddler involvement

American Whitewater has proposed a partnership with King County under the newly announced Association Development and Operation Partnerships (ADOP) Program. King County announced this program as a way to meet the public need for enhanced park facilities in a time of budget cuts. Through this program, non-profit groups can enter into a formal partnership agreement with King County Parks. This in turn provides a mechanism for the creation of new and enhanced facilities on land already owned by King County. The County provides the land while the non-profit partner provides volunteer resources, expertise and revenue generating potential to develop and manage the site in a manner consistent with public needs. The partner organization takes this opportunity to develop a concept plan and long-term maintenance plan for a site of interest to its membership.

American Whitewater is a national non-profit river conservation and recreation organization dedicated to conserving and restoring America's whitewater resources and opportunities to enjoy them safely. Since its founding in 1957, American Whitewater has grown to 8,000 individual members and more than 180 affiliate clubs representing over 80,000 paddlers nationwide. In Western Washington our affiliate clubs include Washington Kayak Club, University Kayak Club, PaddleTrails and The Mountaineers. As an organization, American Whitewater solves access problems by purchasing, leasing or managing river access points (see attached summary). American Whitewater, through volunteers with our local affiliates, currently manages access at 20 sites across the country, often partnering with government agencies or private land owners. The top priorities for this program are whitewater rivers of national and regional significance that attract visitors from across the country. The Middle Fork of the Snoqualmie fits within this category and represents a high profile project for our membership.

American Whitewater's objectives for management of access sites are:

- Protection of a river's wild and scenic qualities
- Providing public access to the river
- Protection of riparian wildlife habitat from development
- Maintenance of the access site in a relatively undisturbed condition
- Effective site management through local affiliate clubs
- National recognition of successful partnerships through our web site and our magazine, the *AW Journal*.

We propose the following timetable for the Middle Fork Snoqualmie project:

Phase 1 2003-2004: Enter into an ADOP agreement with King County Parks to improve public access point at Granite Creek Flats with capital funds already budgeted by King County. Primary objectives of the improvements include reconnection of the trail between the road and the river and formalization of this point as a river access site.

Phase 2 2004: In conjunction with King County Parks, develop road access and parking at Tanner Landing and develop river access from the parking area. Our direct involvement will be restricted to river access, but we propose a cooperative planning effort with other user groups interested in additional

outdoor activities that can be accommodated at this site (e.g. biking, fishing, hiking, dog walking, family day use).

Phase 3 2005 – beyond: Ongoing management of river access at both properties using volunteers with local affiliate paddling clubs (Washington Kayak Club, River Trails, etc.). We would also determine if there is a need for off-road parking at Granite Creek Flats. If so, this would likely occur in parallel with a Federal Highway project that has been proposed for the road.

Anticipated Results

Immediate and long-term results from this proposed project will provide cost-effective river access and recreational amenities for future generations. Specific results will include the following:

- The creation of formal public access on one of the region's most popular recreational rivers will enhance opportunities to enjoy this unique regional resource for many people.
- The project will improve access at Granite Creek and Tanner Landing providing both a put-in and take-out for the Middle-Middle run. while serving a broad spectrum of the region's paddling population.
- The improvements will also serve beginners and recreational boaters who utilize the easier sections upstream and downstream of the Middle-Middle.
- Opportunities to enjoy nearly 20 miles of river will be enhanced.
- Heavy craft, such as rafts and canoes, will once again have access to the river.
- In a community where both population density and development pressure are increasing along the river corridor, current and future residents of the North Bend area will secure public river access.

In addition to these direct improvements to public access, the project will increase community commitment to this river resource and lead to stronger partnerships between the paddling community, other recreational interests, local residents, and public land managers that will directly benefit all interested parties in future projects throughout the state.

Support for the Project

As part of the ADOP agreement with King County Parks, American Whitewater and volunteers from local clubs will manage and maintain the property in a manner consistent with what is working on other sites around the country.

Local clubs that have played an active role in this project and have participated in preliminary planning meetings include the Washington Kayak Club, University Kayak Club, PaddleTrails, The Mountaineers, and Washington Recreational River Runners. Members representing these clubs have been active for many years as participants in the creation of the River Corridor Public Use Concept.

The clubs also supported King County in their efforts to identify and purchase the Granite Creek Flats and Tanner Landing parcels and have more recently met with King County Parks to discuss the need to develop a concept plan for the sites. In developing site plans we have access to GIS resources, site photos and meeting space that we can contribute to this planning effort. Volunteers with local clubs will maintain the sites. American Whitewater will collect suggested donations using a steel pipe. These funds will be used for basic maintenance expenses. Once budgeted expenses are met, a fee holiday is declared for the rest of the season.

In addition to the whitewater community, river access for recreational use of the Middle Fork Snoqualmie has broad community support. Designation of the sites were recommended in the River Corridor Public Use Concept that was developed in cooperation with government agencies, non-profit organizations, private industry, and local communities.

Key stakeholders include the City of North Bend along with the whitewater clubs and King County Parks. The North Bend City Council endorsed a concept plan that designates the city as a gateway to recreational opportunities in the Middle Fork Snoqualmie valley. Other key players include the US Forest Service who recently initiated an Access Travel and Management study that covers the upper half of the

watershed. American Whitewater and local paddling clubs have been active participants in that process.

Other user groups are also interested in the development of both these sites, particularly Tanner Landing. This site could serve as an access point for the Snoqualmie Valley trail which runs along an old railroad grade and is thus popular with families and young children who enjoy biking and hiking. Our long-term vision is to have a site that provides family-based recreational opportunities that emphasize participation from kids and young adults. The Middle Fork Snoqualmie River is the region's most popular area for teaching paddlesports to youth and has been the site of whitewater training camps and general river safety training. River access is popular and valuable to fishermen, hikers, and families in addition to people engaged in paddlesports.

Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program Role

Because American Whitewater has experience in managing river access sites, the King County Parks Department has invited American Whitewater to develop and implement a plan for their recently purchased sites. However, the local volunteers need assistance with site design and planning. Technical assistance is needed to achieve our objectives. We believe RTCA could facilitate a design planning process such as a charette or design workshop. Through this process RTCA could assist us in developing a concept plan for the site that is dynamic and allows for input from a diversity of interest groups.

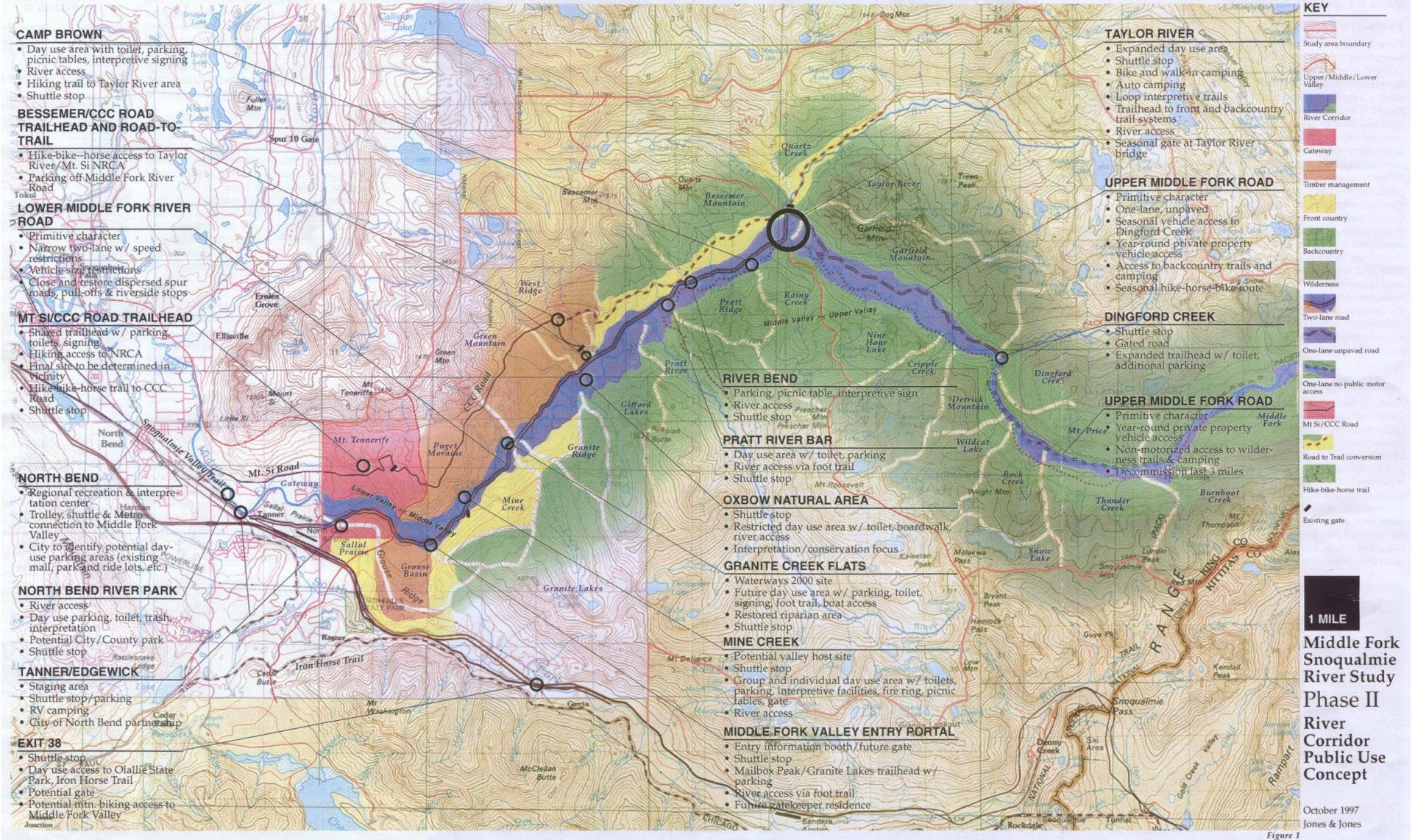
Building effective partnerships with other user groups and interested members of the public is important to make sure that our ideas are consistent with overall community objectives. We are also asking for assistance in identifying funding sources and a plan for long-term maintenance of the site. Although it may take several years to achieve all our objectives, a one year commitment from the RTCA will provide us with the technical expertise we need to develop an implementation plan.

Contact Information

Thomas O'Keefe, WA Regional Coordinator
American Whitewater
3537 NE 87th St.
Seattle, WA 98115
voice/fax: 206-527-7947
email: okeefe@riversandcreeks.com

Jason Robertson, Access Director
American Whitewater
1424 Fenwick Lane
Silver Spring, MD 20910
email: jason@amwhitewater.org
phone: 866-BOAT4AW
fax: 301-565-6714

Site Maps and Photographs



CAMP BROWN

- Day use area with toilet, parking, picnic tables, interpretive signing
- River access
- Hiking trail to Taylor River area
- Shuttle stop

BESSEMER/CCC ROAD TRAILHEAD AND ROAD-TO-TRAIL

- Hike-bike-horse access to Taylor River/Mt. Si NRCA
- Parking off Middle Fork River Road

LOWER MIDDLE FORK RIVER ROAD

- Primitive character
- Narrow two-lane w/ speed restrictions
- Vehicle size restrictions
- Close and restore dispersed spur roads, pull-offs & riverside stops

MT SI/CCC ROAD TRAILHEAD

- Shaded trailhead w/ parking, toilets, signing
- Hiking access to NRCA
- Final site to be determined in vicinity
- Hike-bike-horse trail to CCC Road
- Shuttle stop

NORTH BEND

- Regional recreation & interpretation center
- Trolley, shuttle & Metro connection to Middle Fork Valley
- City to identify potential day-use parking areas (existing mall, park and ride lots, etc.)

NORTH BEND RIVER PARK

- River access
- Day use parking, toilet, trash, interpretation
- Potential City/County park
- Shuttle stop

TANNER/EDGEWICK

- Staging area
- Shuttle stop/parking
- RV camping
- City of North Bend partnership

EXIT 38

- Shuttle stop
- Day use access to Olallie State Park, Iron Horse Trail
- Potential gate
- Potential mtn-biking access to Middle Fork Valley

TAYLOR RIVER

- Expanded day use area
- Shuttle stop
- Bike and walk-in camping
- Auto camping
- Loop interpretive trails
- Trailhead to front and backcountry trail systems
- River access
- Seasonal gate at Taylor River bridge

UPPER MIDDLE FORK ROAD

- Primitive character
- One-lane, unpaved
- Seasonal vehicle access to Dingford Creek
- Year-round private property vehicle access
- Access to backcountry trails and camping
- Seasonal hike-horse-bike route

DINGFORD CREEK

- Shuttle stop
- Gated road
- Expanded trailhead w/ toilet, additional parking

UPPER MIDDLE FORK ROAD

- Primitive character
- Year-round private property vehicle access
- Non-motorized access to wilderness trails & camping
- Decommission last 3 miles

RIVER BEND

- Parking, picnic table, interpretive sign
- River access
- Shuttle stop

PRATT RIVER BAR

- Day use area w/ toilet, parking
- River access via foot trail
- Shuttle stop

OXBOW NATURAL AREA

- Shuttle stop
- Restricted day use area w/ toilet, boardwalk, river access
- Interpretation/conservation focus

GRANITE CREEK FLATS

- Waterways 2000 site
- Future day use area w/ parking, toilet, signing, foot trail, boat access
- Restored riparian area
- Shuttle stop

MINE CREEK

- Potential valley host site
- Shuttle stop
- Group and individual day use area w/ toilets, parking, interpretive facilities, fire ring, picnic tables, gate
- River access

MIDDLE FORK VALLEY ENTRY PORTAL

- Entry information booth/future gate
- Shuttle stop
- Mailbox Peak/Granite Lakes trailhead w/ parking
- River access via foot trail
- Future gatekeeper residence

KEY

- Study area boundary
- Upper/Middle/Lower Valley
- River Corridor
- Gateway
- Timber management
- Front country
- Backcountry
- Wilderness
- Two-lane road
- One-lane unpaved road
- One-lane no public motor access
- Mt Si/CCC Road
- Road to Trail conversion
- Hike-bike-horse trail
- Existing gate

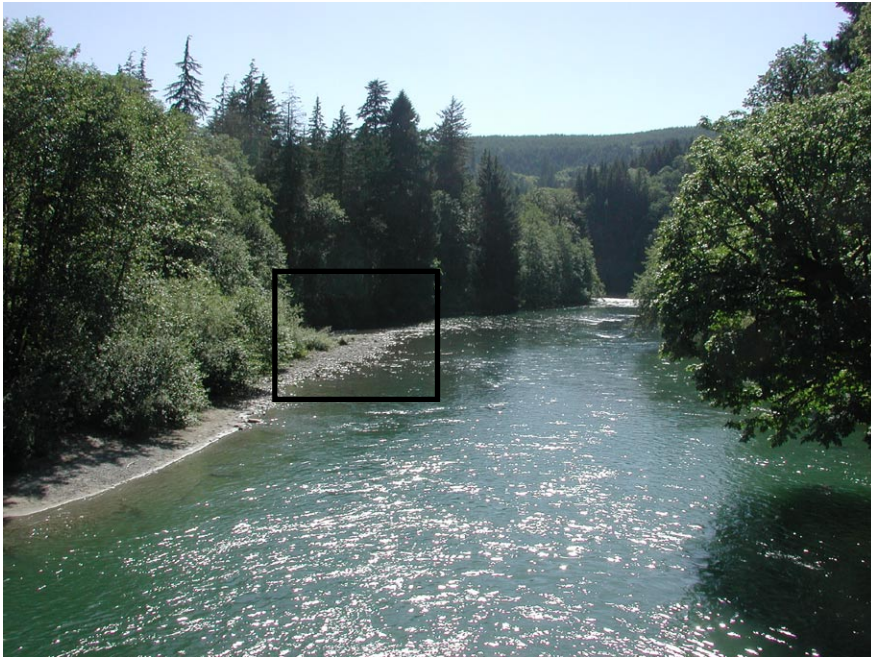
1 MILE

Middle Fork Snoqualmie River Study Phase II River Corridor Public Use Concept

October 1997 Jones & Jones

Figure 1

Granite Creek Flats Site Photos



Beach on river left providing access.



Berm currently blocking trail access from the road.



Field on the site that was once cleared for home construction.



Current parking arrangement provides space for 3-5 cars.

Tanner Landing Site Photos



Field that covers the central area of the site.



Douglas fir and cedar trees are found along the river's edge.



The Snoqualmie Valley Trail forms the southern border of the site.



An eddy provides convenient access to a beach.

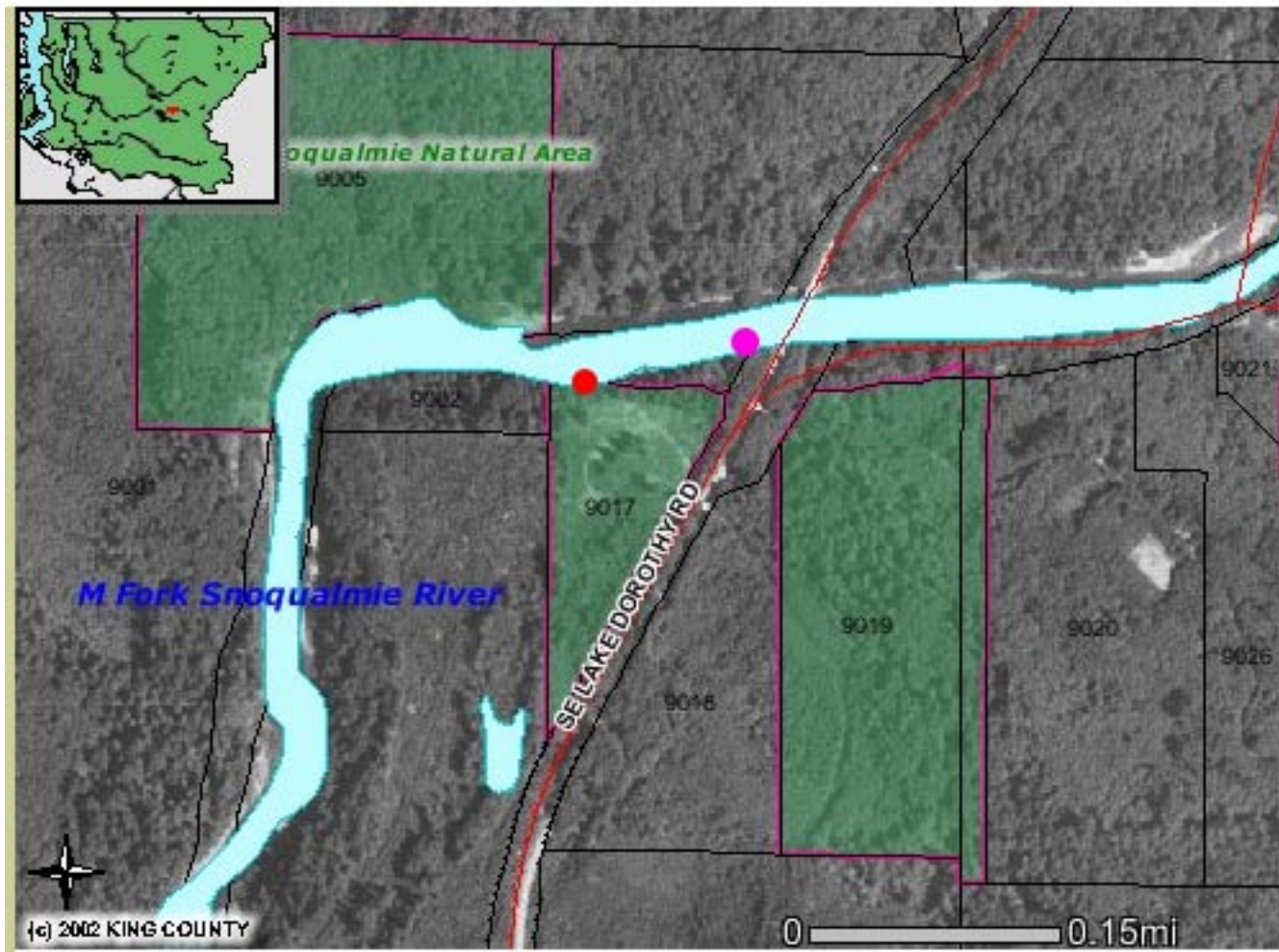
Little Mt. Si Trailhead



The nearby access to the Little Mt. Si trailhead which was opened earlier this year provides some ideas for development of the Tanner Landing. There is a parking lot for a couple dozen cars that is open from 7 am to 9 pm and an outhouse and information sign.

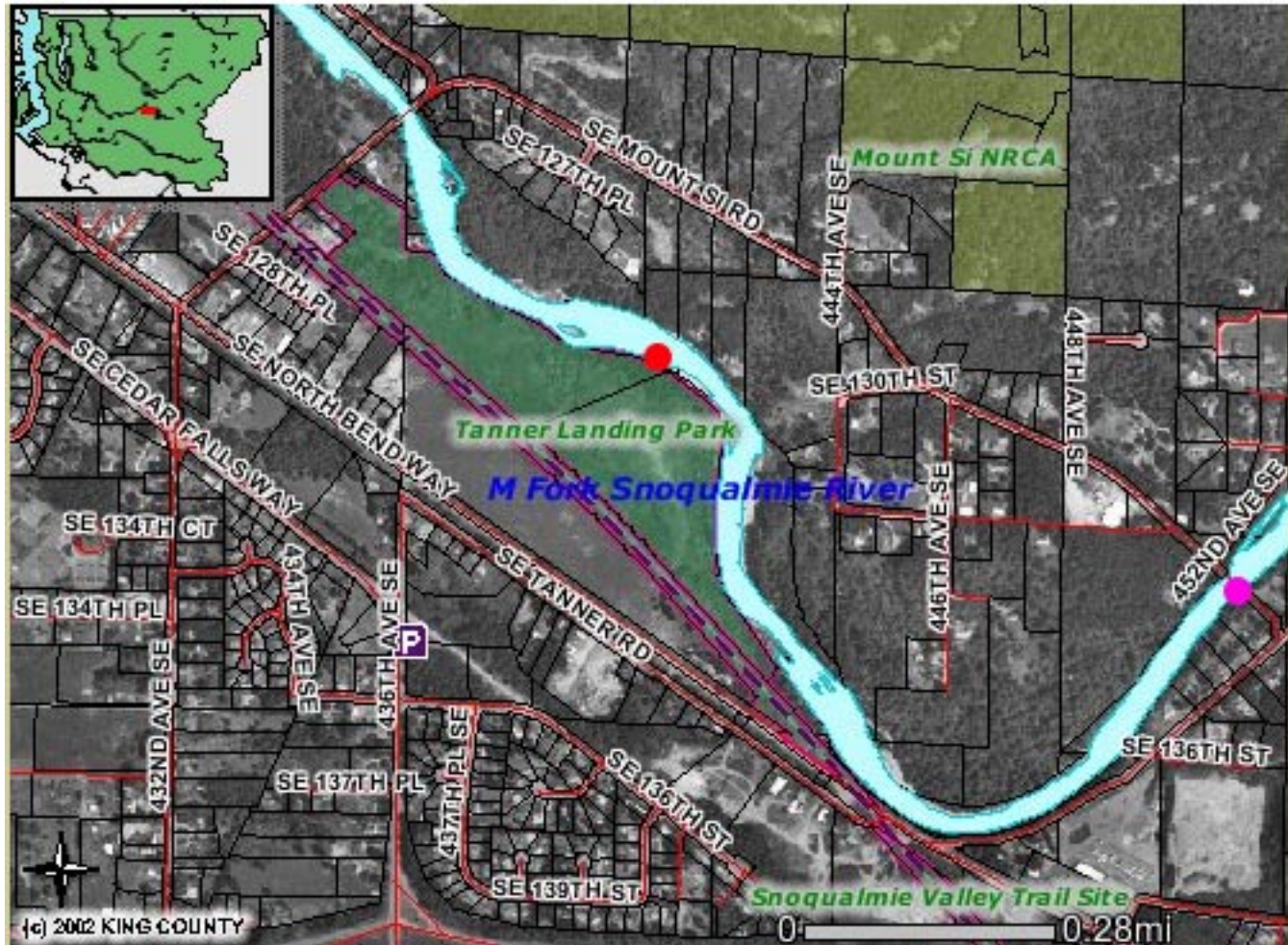
Granite Creek Flats

Current access is possible along the bridge (purple circle), but there is no trail to the river and some bushwacking is necessary to launch. The site is very challenging for rafts or other larger craft. The new potential launch point is downstream (red circle). This site was historically used for river access before a large berm was constructed that effectively blocks the trail and inhibits convenient access. Parking options at this site will need to be examined



Tanner Landing

Current access is possible along a right-of-way (purple circle), but this is in the middle of a residential neighborhood. This site is also very challenging for rafts or other larger craft due to the small eddy and lack of a convenient beach. The new potential launch point is approximately half a mile downstream (red circle). This site holds tremendous potential not only as a river access site but as a point of entry for the Snoqualmie Valley Trail that forms the southern border of the property.





Current Parking Situation

Parking at the current take-out along Tanner Road is limited and when the Middle-Middle is running on a weekend, boater cars quickly fill the available parking along this residential street. King County purchased the Tanner Landing property in part to shift river access to a more appropriate site that would not be subject to the concerns of private property owners.

American Whitewater's Access Program

American Whitewater's Experience in Managing Public Access

Acquiring land and/or acquiring for access is an exciting and often fast-moving adventure for American Whitewater's volunteers and club affiliates, as well as being a concrete means of establishing a lasting legacy on favorite rivers around the country.

In the Nov/Dec '94 issue of our Journal, American Whitewater published an article about solving access problems by purchasing, leasing, or managing access points. American Whitewater chose to become a land trust by getting involved directly with land transactions and management with the aim of protecting land for recreational access.

The strength of this program is enormous! For starters, no other river conservation or recreation group has focused on the need to secure public river access on a systematic, nationwide basis. Further, by becoming involved with land transactions, we have been able to turn tenuous, informal agreements (or disagreements) between boaters and landowners into binding, permanent access solutions. We have also been proactive, guaranteeing public access to rivers before it becomes a problem.

Our efforts have paid off big dividends on many rivers including California's N. Fork of the Smith, New York's Black River, Maryland's Youghiogeny, and Kentucky's Elkhorn.

On the Class III Smith, AW met with the local groups and the Forest Service to assess the situation. We then took the problem to Congressman Hamburg to push for money to get appropriated. The result: a neighboring Forest Service district helped to structure a land swap including some of their land holdings.

In New York, AW pushed the city of Watertown to establish a riverfront park on the Class III-IV Black River, opening access to some surfing waves that were previously fenced off by barbed wire.

On the Youghiogeny, AW built changing rooms and a small beach at the take-out. More importantly, we also adopted management of the put-in from Maryland's Department of Natural Resources and have successfully saved the State thousands of dollars.

On the Elkhorn, AW purchased a public take-out for non-commercial boaters thereby securing permanent access for canoers, kayakers, and rafters.

These successes serve as a model for future access solutions.

We specifically target lands that are privately owned, sites where access has traditionally been an informal agreement with landowners. It is particularly critical to identify rivers that are becoming more popular, more developed (i.e. recent house construction), more abused (i.e. people leaving trash), property where local residents have raised safety concerns unassociated with boating (i.e. drowning at the local swimming hole), and property that will change hands in the near future.

AW's Acquisitions Successes

AW has a track record of success with acquiring access points. We started our acquisition program in 1997 with a purchase of the take-out for the Blackwater and Dry Fork Rivers in West Virginia. Since then, we have acquired access points through purchase or lease in about 20 locations. Some of these are:

American Whitewater owns:

- Blackwater River property in Hendricks, WV (since 1997).
- Watauga River property in Johnson Co, TN (since 1998).
- Johns Creek property in VA (since 1999)
- Elkhorn River property in KY (since 2000)

American Whitewater manages:

- Upper Yough River property Sang Run, MD for MD Department of The Environment at \$0 per year (since 2001).

American Whitewater leases:

- Sandy River property, WV from Power Company at \$1/decade (since 1992)
- Cartecay River property, GA from River Right Outfitters at \$1/year (since 2001)
- Gauley River, Mason Branch (AKA Panther Creek) from landowner at \$1/year (since 1990).

American Whitewater funded acquisitions:

- Alberton Gorge, MT
- Rio Grande Hidalgo Falls, TX

American Whitewater found partners to acquire access:

- Arkansas River, CO (1997)
- Black River, NY (1996)
- Smith River, CA (1994)

American Whitewater has focused our acquisition program on small access sites that receive low to moderate levels of use. Most of the sites we own or manage are less than 5 acres and park a maximum of 50 vehicles. Our sites are designed for athletic individuals who can carry their own boats from the river to their vehicles.

The most used site we manage is on the Gauley River. This site is used by upwards of 2,000 visitors each weekend for the duration of the six week autumn release season when the reservoir is drawn down. The site is a large grassy field and can easily handle more than 500 vehicles.