

Yakima River Canyon Scenic Byway Initiative

(Kittitas and Yakima Counties)

Memorandum of Understanding

Among and Between:

Cascade Land Conservancy, Kittitas Environmental Education Network, Washington State Department of Transportation, Kittitas County, Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife, Bureau of Land Management, Kittitas County Field and Stream, Canyon River Ranch, Economic Development Group of Kittitas County, Ellensburg Chamber of Commerce, Yakima Valley Visitors and Convention Bureau, Kittitas County Conservation District, Mid-Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group, Central Washington University, City of Ellensburg, Yakima Greenway Foundation, Yakima Basin Fish and Wildlife Recovery Board, Eaton Ranch, City of Selah, Red's Fly Shop

I. PURPOSE

The purpose of this MOU is to establish and describe a Partnership that is dedicated to designing, implementing, and promoting the Yakima River Canyon Scenic Byway Initiative in Kittitas and Yakima Counties.

II. VISION

The Yakima River Canyon Scenic Byway is a world-class drive for visitors and residents of Washington State. It embodies the Central Washington experience from its scenic shrub-steppe vistas to its diverse recreational opportunities, and rich geological, natural, and cultural heritage. The Byway enhances communities and places of interest along and nearby the corridor, increases tourism, and adds to the local culture and economic base. The Yakima River Canyon Scenic Byway Partnership seeks to tell the Byway's story and broaden the traveler's experience through improvements that make the route safer and more accessible to all who wish to experience its natural beauty.

III. MISSION

To tell the Yakima River Canyon Scenic Byway story and broaden the traveler's experience through improvements that make the route more available to all who wish to experience its natural beauty.

IV. STATEMENT OF MUTUAL BENEFITS AND INTERESTS

Background

In 1967 the state legislature authorized a bill (Senate Bill 424) providing for the development of scenic and recreational highways throughout the state. Following the passage of the bill, the State Parks and Recreation Commission and the State Highway Department studied sites around the state for designation. The Yakima River Canyon Scenic Byway (YRCSB) "was proposed as the state's first scenic corridor due to its great potential for allowing the traveler to pass through beautiful country at a pace enabling him to enjoy and appreciate its beauty" (Daniel J. Evans, Governor).

The main goal of the scenic byway program was to ensure that the traveler could enjoy outstanding aesthetic, historical and cultural values while also allowing access to recreation opportunities like hunting, fishing, hiking and biking "in such a manner as to not interfere with the traveler on the highway." Unfortunately, since the Yakima River Canyon Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan (CMP) was never fully implemented, other recreational pursuits are now seriously interfering with safe driving conditions on the YRCSB State Route 821.

The YRCSB is widely accessed by both community members and visitors. Locals use the drive between Ellensburg and Selah as a relaxing and beautiful way to commute north and south, to experience the stark beauty of the shrub-steppe habitat, and share wildlife viewing and other recreational pursuits with friends and family who are visiting the area. The Canyon is also

popular with the cycling community even despite the narrow shoulders. With several fly-fishing companies taking advantage of the blue-ribbon trout fishery, multiple camping grounds, and several float-boat operators/rental companies, thousands of tourists and recreationalists use the YRCSB throughout the year.

In the four decades since the Corridor Management Plan was developed the Bureau of Land Management has purchased over 9,000 acres along the byway and developed four recreation sites (Umtanum, Lmuma Creek, Big Pines and Roza). In addition, the WA Department of Fish and Wildlife has purchased much of the viewscape along the byway and now offers hunting and hiking access to over 100,000 acres of land in the Wenas and LT Murray Wildlife Areas. Despite these developments several vital components of the plan were never fully implemented. As a result, this historic stretch of highway and its surrounding landscape remain an under-developed treasure. The main goal of the Scenic Byway Program, to merge road safety with recreation access, is not being met.

Tourism and Economic Development

Recreation-based tourism is a huge part of Kittitas and Yakima Counties' economies. The revitalization of the Yakima River Canyon Scenic Byway will draw in tourists and new residents to our area, which bring with them support for our tax bases and economic growth opportunities. The Yakima River's Blue Ribbon Trout Fishery and the abundant river floating access attract people from all over the country. The byway serves as a physical link between communities and is also a vital economic highway representing significant tourism dollars and connecting visitors to the businesses at both ends of the byway and every point in between.

Recreation and Natural Resources

Access to recreational opportunities is paramount to public use of the Yakima River Canyon Scenic Byway. The byway, located centrally in the state, is well positioned to be a recreational hub that several communities can enjoy and benefit from. In addition to the economic incentives, the enhancement of recreation along the byway will provide visitors, community members and tourists alike, with more opportunities to enjoy and connect with the local landscape and wildlife. The Yakima River Canyon is rich in natural resources. Visitors to the byway have the opportunity to appreciate its abundant wildlife, spectacular wildflower blooms, endangered shrub-steppe habitat, the volcanic basalt cliffs left in the wake of Mt. Mazama, and the wondering curves of a river teaming with wild salmon.

Cultural and Historic Resources

The canyon is also an incredible cultural resource due to its long history of importance to human communities. Evidence of a civilization dating back to 3000 BCE was found within the canyon, and although not fully documented, evidence suggests multiple European settlements from the 1800's are present. Unfortunately, many traveling and recreating along the byway are unaware of the bounty of cultural history that surrounds them. The heritage of the area is too remarkable not to be shared. Increased and updated interpretative signing along the byway, in addition to the proposed Yakima River Canyon Scenic Byway Interpretative Center at Helen McCabe Park, will provide much needed educational opportunities.

Transportation

One of the primary goals of the original 1968 Yakima River Canyon Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan was to create safe driving conditions along the byway. A fundamental element of the YRCSB vision is to identify and improve transportation safety in the corridor. In addition, a multi-modal focus, which provides hikers and bikers with safer routes along the roadway, is now likely to be a larger priority than it was in the past.

V. PARTNERS

This MOU is made and entered into by and between the following entities:

1. **Bureau of Land Management**, an agency of the United States of America.
2. **Cascade Land Conservancy**, a nonprofit 501 (c) (3) Washington corporation.

3. **Kittitas Environmental Education Network (KEEN)**, a nonprofit 501 (c) (3) organization registered in Washington State.
4. **Kittitas County Conservation District**, a governmental subdivision of the State of Washington, organized under the provisions of chapter 184, Laws of Washington 1973 1st ex. Sess., and chapter 89.08 RCW.
5. **Washington State Department of Transportation**, an agency of the State of Washington.
6. **Kittitas County**, a political subdivision of the State of Washington.
7. **Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife**, an agency of the State of Washington.
8. **Kittitas County Field and Stream**, a nonprofit 501 (c) (3) organization registered in Washington State.
9. **Canyon River Ranch**, a private recreation & residence community located in the scenic Yakima River Canyon.
10. **Economic Development Group of Kittitas County**, a nonprofit 501 (c) (3) Washington corporation.
11. **Ellensburg Chamber of Commerce**, a nonprofit 501 (c) (6) Washington corporation.
12. **Yakima Valley Visitors and Convention Bureau**, a nonprofit 501 (c) (6) Washington corporation.
13. **Mid-Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group**, a nonprofit 501 (c) (3) Washington corporation.
14. **Central Washington University**, an agency of the State of Washington.
15. **City of Ellensburg**, a municipal corporation organized under the laws of Washington.
16. **Yakima Greenway Foundation**, a private, nonprofit land trust.
17. **Yakima Basin Fish and Wildlife Recovery Board**, a regional recovery organization formed under RCW 77.85.090 and nonprofit corporation organized under chapter 24.06 RCW.
18. **Eaton Ranch**, a Limited Liability Corporation.
19. **City of Selah**, a municipal corporation organized under the laws of Washington.
20. **Red's Fly Shop**, a private corporation organized under the laws of Washington.

VI. PARTNERSHIP PARTICIPATION, STRUCTURE AND OPERATIONS

The Partnership participants mutually agree that:

1. Participation is open at any time to government agencies, conservation organizations, educational institutions, and private entities that work or have an interest in the Yakima River Canyon Scenic Byway.
2. The Partnership shall establish its own working rules, including a procedure for designating the Chair. The position of Partnership Chair shall rotate every two years to a different partner entity.

3. The Partners shall meet a minimum of four times per year at quarterly intervals. Additional meetings may be scheduled as agreed to by the Partners, and include meetings at various locations as determined by the Partnership.

VII. PARTNERSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES

The Partners mutually agree to:

1. Develop and serve as an advisory group for updating, planning and implementing the Corridor Management Plan for the Yakima River Canyon Scenic Byway.
2. Communicate the vision, purpose and goals of the Yakima River Canyon Scenic Byway Initiative to the public through development and dissemination of outreach materials.
3. Work together to further the implementation goals and objectives of the Yakima River Canyon Scenic Byway by assisting with the development of proposals, grant applications, and fundraising efforts, as appropriate, for the purpose of updating and implementing the Corridor Management Plan.

VIII. MUTUAL AGREEMENTS AND UNDERSTANDINGS BY AND BETWEEN THE PARTNERSHIP PARTICIPANTS

The Partners agree that:

1. This MOU in no way restricts participants from involvement in similar activities with other public and private agencies, organizations and individuals.
2. Nothing in this MOU shall be construed as obligating Partners or Cooperators to expend funds or to provide resources or be involved in any obligation for future payment of money or provision of resources.
3. Modifications within the scope of this MOU shall be made by formal consent of the parties, by issuance of a written modification, signed and dated by the parties, prior to any changes becoming effective.
4. Any partner may withdraw at any time before the date of expiration, by providing written notice to the Partner Chair.
5. This MOU expires no later than 31 December 2014, at which time it is subject to renewal through review and/or amendment or by extension in its current form.

IX. EFFECTIVE DATE

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, the parties hereto have executed this MOU as of the last written date below.

Cascade Land Conservancy

Name, Title Date: _____

Kittitas Environmental Education Network

Name, Title Date: _____

Washington State Department of Transportation

Name, Title Date: _____

Kittitas County

Name, Title Date: _____

Washington State Department of Fish and Wildlife

Name, Title Date: _____

Bureau of Land Management

Name, Title Date: _____

Kittitas County Field and Stream

Name, Title Date: _____

Canyon River Ranch

Name, Title Date: _____

Kittitas County Economic Development Group

Name, Title Date: _____

Ellensburg Chamber of Commerce

Name, Title Date: _____

Yakima Valley Visitors and Convention Bureau

Name, Title Date: _____

Kittitas County Conservation District

Name, Title

Date:

Mid-Columbia Fisheries Enhancement Group

Name, Title

Date:

Central Washington University

Name, Title

Date:

City of Ellensburg

Name, Title

Date:

Yakima Greenway

Name, Title

Date:

Yakima Basin Fish and Wildlife Recovery Board

Name, Title

Date:

Eaton Ranch

Name, Title

Date:

City of Selah

Name, Title

Date: