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TESTIMONY OF THE
NORTH CASCADES CONSERVATION COUNCIL
before the
Senate Ways and Means Committee
Olympia, WA

February 21, 2013
On SSB 5367

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity for North Cascades Conservation Council to provide testimony on SSB 5367. North Cascades Conservation Council is opposed to passage of this version of SSB 5367.

The U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and State Department of Ecology are campaigning to construct two new dams in the Yakima Basin, including a dam that would drown and destroy more than 1,000 acres of ancient forest at Bumping Lake, and establish new National Recreation Areas (NRAs) for off-road vehicles.

A year ago, after the close of public comments on the Draft EIS for the Yakima Plan, the dam proponents published a proposal for motorized NRAs in the Upper Yakima, Teanaway, Manastash and Taneum basins of Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest (OWNF), north and south of I-90 in Kittitas County. The NRA proposal would legislatively dedicate 41,000 acres to “backcountry motorized” use, i.e., off-road motorcycles, ATVs and 4x4s on trails, and snowmobiles traveling cross-country. The dam proponents incorporated the NRA proposal into the Final EIS for the Yakima Plan, even though the NRA proposal had been omitted from Draft EIS and thus omitted from the public comment opportunity.

The Final EIS says the NRAs would “attract more users,” i.e., more off-road vehicles into the headwaters, which is bad for fish, bad for water quality, bad for wildlife habitat, and bad for the recreational experiences of other users, who will be driven off the trails by the machines.

Yakima irrigation districts and groups seeking a Federal/State purchase of 46,000 acres of privately owned forestland in the Teanaway area continue to support the Yakima Plan. But within the conservation community opposition continues to grow. Because of the Yakima Plan’s

adverse impacts on OWNF lands, 29 organizations signed letters in March 2012. A letter dated March 11, 2012 objecting to the NRA proposal was signed by these 26 organizations: Alpine Lakes Protection Society; Aqua Permanente; Center for Biological Diversity; Center for Environmental Law & Policy; El Sendero; Endangered Species Coalition; Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs; Friends of Bumping Lake ; Friends of the Earth; Friends of the Teanaway; Friends of Wild Sky; Issaquah Alps Trails Club; Kittitas Audubon Society; Kittitas County Conservation Coalition; Mazamas; MidFORC; North Cascades Conservation Council; Olympic Forest Coalition; Seattle Audubon Society; Sierra Club; Washington Native Plant Society; Wenatchee Mountains Coalition; Western Lands Project; Western Watersheds Project; Wilderness Watch; and Wildlands CPR. A separate March 13, 2012 letter expressing concerns, including that the NRA Proposal “undermines” the National Forest planning processes, was signed by American Whitewater; The Mountaineers; and Washington Wild.

To date, not one of these 29 organizations has become a supporter of the Yakima Plan.

These letters are attached and we request that they be made part of this hearing record.

In summary, we are here to alert the Senate Ways and Means Committee that opposition to the controversial Yakima Plan will continue to grow at the local, state and national level so long as the Plan calls for uneconomical environmentally damaging irrigation dams and adverse impacts to the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.