



North Central Washington Audubon Society  
P.O. Box 2934  
Wenatchee, WA 98807  
[www.ncwaudubon.org](http://www.ncwaudubon.org)

February 14, 2019

Secretary Elaine L. Chao  
Secretary of Transportation  
U.S. Department of Transportation  
1200 New Jersey Avenue SE  
Washington, DC 20590

Re: Support for the Apple Capital Loop INFRA Grant

Dear Secretary Chao:

The North Central Washington Audubon Society (NCWAS) is a non-profit conservation organization, run by volunteers and representing over 500 members within Chelan, Douglas, Okanogan, and Ferry counties. Through the chapter's subcommittee, The Friends of the Horan Natural Area, we have closely followed local and regional planning for the Apple Capital Loop project and have taken note of that project's relationship to the Horan Natural Area (HNA), which is located within the City of Wenatchee at the confluence of the Wenatchee River with the Columbia River.

The Apple Capital Loop project would reduce traffic congestion and improve access, resulting in environmental benefits including reduced fossil fuel use and reduced vehicle emissions. However, transportation projects such as the Apple Capital Loop project also inevitably result in environmental impacts that require mitigation. Improving the HNA as described below provides a unique opportunity to mitigate ecological and social project impacts and to do so within the Apple Capital Loop project area. The NCWAS believes that if the Apple Capital Loop project incorporates mitigation that includes improvements to the HNA, the project will overall result in a net ecological and social benefit. Based on this, we urge support for the City of Wenatchee's application for the Apple Capital Loop INFRA grant. The NCWAS wholeheartedly believes this grant, if provided, can significantly advance Audubon's mission to protect and enhance bird species and their habitats in central Washington.

The Horan Natural Area, which lies to the east of the proposed highway corridor as it approaches the Wenatchee River, is of particular importance in the Wenatchee Valley. Located at the mouth of the Wenatchee River, the HNA is a recognized birding "hotspot" by the American Birding Association. The Horan area supports over 200 bird species in riparian black cottonwood and grassland habitats. In addition to bird-watching, the area provides a natural setting for Wenatchee Valley residents and visitors to hike, run, and paddle in a natural park setting. At the same time, physical changes in the HNA in the recent past have resulted in degradation of habitat in the HNA and a diminishment of the area's natural setting.

A regional long-range planning effort, known as Our Valley Our Future, recognizes the unique value and future potential of the Horan area and has incorporated The Friends of the Horan Natural Area's vision for the long-term ecological and social character of the Horan area into its goals. The Friends of the Horan Natural Area vision emphasizes re-introduction of year-round surface water, restoration of native plant populations, an increase in recreational access and quality in the area, development and implementation of an educational curriculum for K-12 children, and development of an area dedicated to honoring the culture and history of Native People.

Historically, the Horan area was home to P'squosa/Wenatchi/Wenatchapum Native Peoples, and was a well-known regional council grounds since time immemorial. It was a gathering place for bands and tribes throughout the Pacific Northwest where matters of vital importance were transacted. The HNA contains a large, contiguous population of dogbane – a culturally important plant that Native Americans use for fiber. The area also hosts a population of showy milkweed – a plant that is vital to Monarch Butterfly survival. The potential to sustain and increase both dogbane and milkweed species requires protection of existing plants and significant mitigation to reduce invasive plant species.

In the past, water flowed into the Horan area from a variety of man-made and natural sources. These surface water sources have recently been redirected or terminated. Today, flowing surface water occurs intermittently during seasonal snowmelt, periods of extended rainfall, or occasional regional flooding. Fluctuation of groundwater levels sustains some of the man-made ponds, but others are drying up and disappearing. Lack of year-round surface water results in the loss of valuable aquatic habitat for waterfowl and shorebirds, mammals, and amphibians.

When funded, the Apple Capital Loop project will allow reintroduction of sustainable surface water flow. Irrigation return flows and storm water drainage would be routed through wetlands and into five to ten acres of connected ponds and channels. These ponds and channels will support a variety of native riparian plant species that provide important habitat for resident and migrating birds, wildlife and amphibian species.

Local residents of the Wenatchee Valley use the Horan area for a variety of recreational purposes. Since the HNA is also well known by national and international bird watchers, some people come from afar to watch birds in the Horan area. Water flowing through the HNA would enrich aesthetics and the quality of recreational experience for people in the area.

The Apple Capital Loop project would allow establishment of vegetative buffers to improve visitor's recreational experience and improve the habitat variety and quality for birds and animals in the area. Improved ecological and educational conditions in the HNA set the stage for an on-site, long-envisioned, environmental learning center to serve the area's diverse population.

The pedestrian trail system in the Horan area would be designed and constructed to improve public access to the HNA, while limiting noise impacts to trail users created by trains and car traffic.

Thank you for your consideration of this letter supporting the City of Wenatchee's Apple Capital Loop INFRA Grant application. Please contact Bruce McCammon if you have questions. He can be reached at 503-380-3733 or [ncwaaudubon@gmail.com](mailto:ncwaaudubon@gmail.com)

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Arthur Campbell". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Arthur Campbell  
President, North Central Washington Audubon Society