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September 13, 2023

The Honorable Peter Buttigieg
Secretary, U.S. Department of Transportation
1200 New Jersey Ave, SE
Washington, DC 20590-001

RE: Neighborhood Access and Equity Grant – US93 Ninepipe Project (Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes)

Dear Secretary Buttigieg:

I write on behalf of Hellgate Hunters & Anglers to express our support for the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes' Neighborhood Access and Equity Grant (NAE) grant to fund a critical portion of US Highway 93 (US93): Ninepipe Project. Hellgate Hunters & Anglers is a locally based rod and gun club representing over 500 sportsmen and women across Western Montana. We have deep ties to the CSKT and enjoy the privilege of recreating on their lands. This project represents their continued dedication to maintaining productive, connected wildlife habitat on tribal lands and the Refuge.

The CSKT has led the way on a national level for proactively addressing habitat connectivity and reducing wildlife-motorist collisions through their use of wildlife crossings. The Ninepipe and Post Creek sections are the last remaining rural improvement gap in the greater US93 corridor between Polson and Missoula, which is a critical north-south highway route between Glacier Park, Canada and I-90 in western Montana. This project in particular runs through critically important grizzly bear habitat and bisects secure riparian zones that grizzlies use for secure cover. This project will build a safer corridor for wildlife, thereby preserving the area as a natural grizzly bear migration route. Additionally, the project will reduce habitat fragmentation in the project area and facilitate wildlife movement along the US 93 corridor, preventing further wildlife/vehicle mortalities in the area.

There is significant value for other species, including upland game bird populations like ring-necked pheasant and Hungarian partridge—two species that draw hunters in droves to the Flathead Reservation each fall. This is a significant source of revenue for the CSKT's wildlife management work and the local economy. Projects like this ensure that upland game populations will continue to enjoy connected habitat without the risk of crossing a highway.

Thank you for your consideration of this important project.

Sincerely,

Andrew Gorder
President
Hellgate Hunters & Anglers