

**To Mayor and Council:**

**Re: Cheakamus West FSR closures and their impact on whitewater recreation**

[BC Whitewater](#) is a provincial organization that represents the interests of whitewater paddlers in British Columbia. We're focused primarily on protecting public access and free-flowing rivers.

We write to you today to reiterate the concerns we raised last year regarding access to the Cheakamus River. The Cheakamus is a world-renowned whitewater destination in the kayaking and rafting community due to its quality, accessibility, and suitability for a broad spectrum of skill levels. The river is home to exciting rapids, beautiful scenery, diverse geology, crystal clear water, friendly spectators and one of the longest paddling seasons of any river found on the planet. All of these combine to make the Cheakamus River one of BC's most valuable recreational whitewater resources. The Cheakamus is one of the key assets that makes the Sea to Sky corridor a world class paddling destination.

We've now experienced nearly two full seasons where access to the Upper Cheakamus has been disrupted by the development of the "Parcel A" site in Cheakamus Crossing. We are increasingly concerned that we may see long term restrictions on our community's ability to access the river via the Cheakamus West FSR, both as a launch site (roughly 3km up the road) and as a take out and staging area (at the House Rock parking lot). We believe the ongoing closures and potential long-term closure are inconsistent with the strategies identified in Whistler's [2015 Recreation and Leisure Master Plan](#) (RLMP).

As we communicated last year, while paddlers have been making use of the river-right Cheakamus East FSR because there has been no other option, the river-right access is more difficult, more dangerous, and more likely to lead to user conflict. The river-left access to the waterfall at the reach's start on the Riparian Trail is critical to safe use and it allows paddlers to properly scout, set safety, or portage. Our community has felt these impacts over the last two seasons and it is heavily impacting people's ability to safely enjoy the river.

Similar concerns apply to the takeout access at the House Rock parking area: there is nowhere straightforward to get out on river right at the end of the reach. There's also nowhere to park cars; for a river that regularly sees tens of paddlers on a given weekend day, parking on the side of an already overly busy FSR simply doesn't work.

The 2015 RLMP highlights the value of Whistler offering "a complete range of whitewater kayaking opportunities with unprecedented ease of access and water reliability;" it also highlights a desired future where "Whistler has the confidence that its whitewater opportunities are protected for the long term." The evolving access situation on the Upper Cheakamus is vastly diminishing this value and putting that future into question. We understand the need for temporary closures during construction, but we are writing to re-emphasize that both the House Rock parking area and access to the put-in via the Cheakamus West FSR are critical to safe, accessible use of Whistler's best whitewater asset. The last two summers have made this abundantly clear, both to the kayak community and to everyone else attempting to share the high-traffic area.

The RLMP is an encouraging foundation, but the evolving access situation continues to trouble us. Locals and both domestic and international tourists cherish the Cheakamus River; long-term

diminished access would be an unparalleled loss for the paddling community worldwide. We are hoping that the municipality will ensure that restoring access is a top priority.

Thank you for taking the time to review this letter. We are available for more information at your convenience and look forward to collaborating with you to protect long-term access to this valued natural asset.

I've also attached the letter we sent last year that contains detailed suggestions and concerns regarding future options.

Sincerely,

Nick Gottlieb

[BC Whitewater](#)

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