



March 20, 2023

Washburn County Zoning
10 4th Avenue
Shell Lake, WI 54871

Dear Administrator Beers, Chair Ford, and Zoning Committee Members,

On behalf of Wild Rivers Conservancy of the St. Croix and Namekagon I am writing to oppose the authorization of a conditional use permit to Big River Holdings for a large RV campground at Heartwood Resort, in the vicinity of Howell Landing on the Namekagon River. As staff for the Conservancy I am often asked what is my favorite stretch of the Namekagon River. While I love and have often paddled the whole river, without hesitation I tell people it's County K Landing to Howell Landing. It's easy to get to the Namekagon in about an hour from my home near Grantsburg and have a wild river experience, even on a Sunday afternoon in the summer. This stretch is notable because it's so far from towns and highways.

The Saint Croix National Scenic Riverway (Riverway), comprised of the St. Croix and Namekagon Rivers, is the nation's first wild and scenic river national park. This campground proposal does not align with the congressional designation as a wild and scenic river, meant to preserve its outstanding natural, cultural, and recreational values for the enjoyment of present and future generations. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act was prescient because it foresaw undeveloped areas only becoming fewer and more valuable as the years go by. This stretch of the Riverway is a perfect example of the rarity of such areas today. An RV park also does not fit the rural character in this part of Washburn County.

This section of the Namekagon truly exhibits the reasons this river was designated in 1968. People come from around the world to enjoy this world-class fishery. This healthy, intact river system is home to one of the richest examples of plant and animal life the Midwest has to offer, many of which are rare and endangered species. When you kayak or canoe this incredibly beautiful stretch of the river, it feels like you are in an undeveloped wilderness. Allowing a 140-unit RV campground here, **the equivalent of creating a small town of 280-560 people or more on the edge of this national park**, does not make sense for so many reasons. And this is only phase one. If phase two occurs, there is potential for upwards of 1,000 people, a locally dense population having intense impacts on a relatively small area.

An RV campground located this close to the Riverway would have adverse effects on the river itself and the thousands of people that visit annually. Water quality would be impacted from increased impervious surface and septic/sewer systems. Informal, "social" trails are extremely likely to develop from the campground to the river, changing the terrain and view from the river. The dark skies that people now enjoy will be lost to light pollution from this proposed campground. Smoke from a concentrated number of campfires will lower air quality. Noise

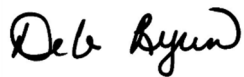
levels from the campers and increased ATV/UTV use that Heartwood promotes will forever change the peaceful experience people now enjoy. There is increased potential for illegal ATV use in and next to the Riverway, destroying habitat, disturbing people and wildlife, and causing erosion.

The proposed RV camp entrance appears to be located on Burian Place, south of Highway 77. The narrow, winding road is in a rural residential area that leads to Howell Landing. The National Park Service manages this popular group campsite as a primitive and remote experience for visitors with few amenities. We are deeply concerned that the Landing itself will evolve from a public landing for all to use, to one the resort guests and owner consider their private landing. The safety concerns alone should give the county pause: increased traffic of large recreational vehicles on what was designed to be a low volume, dead-end road; concentrations of people with conflicting recreational uses in a small area; limited access for emergency response vehicles.

The Namekagon here is narrow and has a few riffles. It's a birder's dream, especially in the spring during migration. The water is clear, and an abundance of fish, including sturgeon, is easily seen from one's boat on a clear day. In summer, when other stretches of the river are shallow, here one can float, enjoy a lazy day swimming and picnicking. In the fall it's wise to wear blaze orange as hunting is allowed, and people who hunt know the area is rich with game. The thought of allowing the equivalent of a densely populated town along this stretch of river hurts my heart.

For the many reasons listed above and more, please deny the conditional use permit request by Big Rivers Holding to create a campground at the Heartwood Resort.

Respectfully,



Deb Ryun
Executive Director

Cc:
Stu Neville, Chair, Wild Rivers Conservancy
Craig Hansen, Superintendent, Saint Croix National Scenic Riverway

Wild Rivers Conservancy's mission is to inspire stewardship to forever ensure the rare ecological integrity of the St. Croix & Namekagon Riverway. As the official Friends Group, we support and complement the National Park Service's work within the Riverway. The Conservancy is the voice of the river and the only organization with a watershed-wide scope in the St. Croix River basin.