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March 6, 2025

Honorable Jesse Gabriel, Chair
Assembly Committee on Budget
1021 O Street, Suite 8230
Sacramento, CA 95814

Honorable David Tangipa, Vice Chair
Assembly Committee on Budget
1021 O Street, Suite 8230
Sacramento, CA 95814

Honorable Steve Bennett, Chair
Assembly Committee on Budget
Subcommittee No. 4
1021 O Street, Suite 8230
Sacramento, CA 95814

RE: FY 2026–27 Budget Request for the Whiskeytown Environmental School Rebuild Project

Dear Chair Gabriel, Vice Chair Tangipa, and Chair Bennett,

We respectfully request \$1.5 million in funding to support the rebuilding of the Whiskeytown Environmental School (WES) located in the Whiskeytown National Recreation Area near Redding, California. This investment will help restore a beloved outdoor science education program that has served generations of Northern California students and strengthen opportunities for hands-on environmental education in the North State.

Whiskeytown Environmental School was severely damaged during the 2018 Carr Fire, forcing the suspension of its signature week-long residential outdoor science program. While some programming has returned in limited form, the residential education component—serving thousands of students annually—cannot resume until student housing and core campus facilities are rebuilt.

For more than fifty years, WES has provided a unique immersive learning experience that connects students to California's natural environment while teaching science, teamwork, and personal responsibility. Since its founding in 1970 through a partnership between the Shasta County Office of Education and the National Park Service, the program has served more than 151,000 children from Northern California.

The WES program is particularly important for rural and underserved communities. In Shasta County, 58.3 percent of students qualify for free or reduced-price meals, and many families cannot afford private summer camps or other outdoor educational opportunities. For many students, WES provides their first overnight educational experience away from home and their only opportunity to participate in a residential outdoor science program.

The rebuilding effort is already well underway. Since launching the “Grow Back Stronger” capital campaign in 2022, WES Community and its partners have raised approximately \$5.9 million through private donations, pledges, and grants toward the project's \$7.5 million fundraising goal. Major contributions have been provided by the Shasta County Office of Education, Sierra Pacific Foundation, and the McConnell Foundation.

The full rebuild project includes construction of new student cabins, modernization of the campus kitchen and dining hall, wildfire-hardened infrastructure, new educational facilities, habitat restoration, and improved accessibility throughout the campus. These upgrades will allow the school to safely host residential outdoor education programs for generations of students to come.

This request represents the final portion of the community-led fundraising effort and will help unlock matching federal funding through the National Park Service's Centennial Challenge program. State participation in this effort will ensure that the rebuilding project can proceed on schedule and that thousands of Northern California students can once again participate in the week-long outdoor education program.

California's students benefit enormously from experiential environmental education programs like WES, which help foster scientific curiosity, environmental stewardship, and personal growth. Restoring this facility will strengthen outdoor learning opportunities while supporting a treasured institution in Northern California.

Therefore, we respectfully request \$1.5 million in one-time General Fund support in the FY 2026–27 budget to assist with the rebuilding of Whiskeytown Environmental School.

Thank you for your consideration of this request. If you require additional information or would like to discuss this proposal further, please contact Andrew Nickens in my office at (916) 319-2011.

Sincerely,



HEATHER HADWICK
Assemblymember, District 1



DARSHANA PATEL
Assemblymember, District 76

Cc: Members, Assembly Budget Committee
Members, Assembly Budget Subcommittee #4 on Climate Crisis, Resources, Energy, and Transportation
Christian Griffith, Assembly Budget Committee
Nicole Vazquez, Assembly Budget Committee
Shy Forbes, Assembly Budget Committee, Assembly Budget Committee #4 on Climate Crisis, Resources, Energy, and Transportation
Erin Gabel, Assembly Budget Committee
Jennifer Kim, Assembly Budget Committee
Patrick Le, Assembly Budget Committee
Genevieve Morelos, Assembly Budget Committee
Christine Miyashiro, Assembly Budget Committee, Assembly Budget Committee #4 on Climate Crisis, Resources, Energy, and Transportation
Bernie Orozco, Assembly Budget Committee
Joe Shinstock, Assembly Budget Committee, Assembly Budget Committee #4 on Climate Crisis, Resources, Energy, and Transportation