

**Exh. MD-1T
Docket TS-180677
Witness: Mike Dotson**

**BEFORE THE WASHINGTON
UTILITIES AND TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION**

**In the Matter of the Application of

BACKCOUNTRY TRAVELS LLC

For a Certificate of Public Convenience
and Necessity to Operate Vessels in
Furnishing Passenger Ferry Service**

**DOCKET TS-180677

COMMISSION STAFF'S
RESPONSE TO LAKE CHELAN
RECREATION, INC.'S MOTION
TO WITHDRAW PROTEST**

TESTIMONY OF

Mike Dotson

**STAFF OF
WASHINGTON UTILITIES AND
TRANSPORTATION COMMISSION**

Public Convenience and Necessity

February 1, 2019

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1 **I. INTRODUCTION**

2

3 **Q. Please state your name and business address.**

4 A. My name is Michael Dotson. My business address is the Richard Hemstad Building,
5 1300 South Evergreen Park Drive Southwest, Olympia, Washington 98504. My email
6 address is michael.dotson@utc.wa.gov.

7

8 **Q. By whom are you employed and in what capacity?**

9 A. I am employed by the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission
10 (Commission) as a transportation specialist in the Commission’s Licensing Services
11 section. I am responsible for, among other things, processing applications for
12 Commission-issued authority filed by people or companies seeking to operate in
13 industries regulated by the Commission.

14

15 **Q. How long has the Commission employed you as a transportation specialist?**

16 A. I have been employed as a transportation specialist since February 2013.

17

18 **Q. Would you please describe your educational and professional background?**

19 A. I hold a Bachelor of Arts degree from Evergreen State College. I was trained by the
20 employee that held my position prior to me.

21

22 **Q. Have you ever testified before the Commission?**

23 A. Yes. I most recently provided testimony in Docket TV-180605.

1 **II. SCOPE AND SUMMARY OF TESTIMONY**

2

3 **Q. What is the scope of your testimony in this proceeding?**

4 A. My testimony concerns the nature of the comments received about the ferry service
5 application of Backcountry Travels LLC (Backcountry Travels).

6

7 **III. PUBLIC CONVENIENCE AND NECESSITY**

8

9 **Q. Are you familiar with Backcountry Travels' application for a certificate to provide**
10 **commercial public ferry service?**

11 A. Yes. I processed the application when it came in.

12

13 **Q. What steps did you take when processing the application?**

14 A. I reviewed the application for completeness, confirmed that the information contained in
15 the application was accurate, and reviewed all of the public comments received. I also
16 facilitated staff's review of the company's financial information, tariff, schedule and
17 route map.

18

19 **Q. Why did you read the statements of support?**

20 A. Washington law requires an applicant to show that public convenience and necessity
21 require the proposed ferry service to receive authority to operate. Reflecting that
22 requirement, the Commission's application for a certificate of public convenience and
23 necessity to provide commercial public ferry service includes a Statement of Support

1 form to be completed by an individual or business/organization supporting the request for
2 operating authority.

3
4 **Q. How many statements of support were submitted in this docket?**

5 A. 227.

6
7 **Q. Is there anything notable about that number?**

8 A. Yes. There were 227 comments in support of the application and three against. This is the
9 largest number of statements of support for a transportation application that I have seen in
10 this or any industry since I began working in Licensing Services.

11
12 **Q. Who provided statements of support for Backcountry Travels' application?**

13 A. Generally, the statements of support come from two groups of people. One group consists
14 of residents of Stehekin and other nearby communities. The other group consists of non-
15 residents who wish to visit Stehekin or nearby communities to visit family or friends or
16 for recreational purposes.

17
18 **Q. Did you notice consistent themes among the comments from each group?**

19 A. Yes. Both groups support additional ferry service on the lake out of a belief that the
20 proposed service would be significantly more convenient for those traveling to or from
21 Stehekin. Both groups also commented that the current service does not provide some
22 amenities that visitors and locals would like.

1 **Q. Why do the commenters believe that the proposed ferry service would be convenient**
2 **for travelers?**

3 A. Both residents and non-residents largely focus their comments on the schedule for the
4 current ferry, and both also mention the difficulty of getting seats on the existing ferry at
5 certain times of the year.
6

7 **Q. What issues do the residents have with the existing ferry schedule?**

8 A. The residents use the ferry to travel from Stehekin to Chelan to conduct business in town.
9 They state that the current boat leaves Stehekin rather late in the day and that, given the
10 long voyage to Chelan, they arrive too late to conduct business the day they travel out.
11 This means that the residents must arrange an overnight stay in Chelan, with all the costs
12 involved. If they cannot finish their business early enough the next day to catch the boat
13 out, or if the next boat does not leave for Stehekin for several days, the residents state that
14 they have to stay in Chelan for multiple days.
15

16 **Q. What issues do the non-residents have with the existing schedule?**

17 A. Like the residents, the non-residents state that the current ferry's departure times from
18 Chelan and Stehekin cause difficulties on both ends of their travel.
19

20 **Q. What issues do the non-resident commenters claim the current ferry schedule**
21 **causes at the start of their trips to Stehekin?**

22 A. Many of them state they come from far away and have to leave for Chelan in the early
23 morning hours or stay overnight in Chelan. Commenters state the first option involves

1 driving at night and some complain they feel this is unsafe. Commenters state that the
2 second option causes them to incur costs. Many commenters also state that in the high
3 season hotel availability is limited and lodging costs are higher in Chelan so they have to
4 stay in outlying locations.

5
6 **Q. What issues do the non-resident commenters claim the current ferry schedule**
7 **causes when they depart from Stehekin?**

8 A. They have similar concerns to the ones voiced by the residents; the late departure from
9 Stehekin means that they arrive in Chelan late in the day. This requires them to either
10 drive at night or stay overnight in Chelan, with all the associated costs.

11
12 **Q. What effect do the non-residents claim these issues have on their travel plans?**

13 A. The non-residents state that the reduced off-season schedule limits the time when visitors
14 can go to Stehekin, and makes a weekend stay completely out of the question without
15 adding additional days on either side. This discourages visitation in the off-season since
16 they cannot stay their desired amount of time, affecting the local businesses.

17
18 **Q. Do the commenters note any other issues?**

19 A. Yes. A few commenters note issues related to schooling, emergencies, and the service
20 quality of the existing ferry.

1 **Q. What issues do the commenters note with schooling?**

2 A. Stehekin has a one room school house that serves elementary and middle school students.
3 High school students attend school in Chelan. If a student must leave Stehekin for an
4 appointment, they will often miss multiple days of school because of the difficulties
5 involved with the boat schedule times discussed above.

6

7 **Q. What issues do commenters note with emergencies?**

8 A. They state that, in case of an emergency, the current ferry is not quick enough or frequent
9 enough to get someone to required services. Currently the only alternative is by
10 helicopter.

11

12 **Q. What service quality issues do the commenters raise?**

13 A. They state that the current service provider is not amenable to “flag stops,” leaving some
14 people unable to go to their private docks on the public ferry. Several commenters also
15 state that the current ferries are old and uncomfortable and lack amenities like better
16 access for disabled people, baby changing tables, and the option to bring a pet along.

17

18 **Q. Did the Commission receive any comments from persons opposed to granting
19 Backcountry Travels a certificate?**

20 A. Yes.

21

22 **Q. How many?**

23 A. Three.

1 **Q. What did those people say in their comments?**

2 A. The commenters say that the addition of a competing ferry company on this route would
3 negatively affect the finances of the incumbent service provider, Lake Chelan Recreation,
4 Inc., resulting in further reduced service. They also argue that the businesses in Stehekin
5 do not provide adequate operations in the winter to accommodate off season tourism, so
6 there is no need for the additional runs in the winter months and that the current operating
7 company provides adequate service and that the existing service satisfies the needs of the
8 public. They also argue that the proposed service from Backcountry Travels is not
9 specialized or unique compared to the incumbent's service.

10

11 **Q. Do those commenting in opposition to the granting of Backcountry Travels'**
12 **application raise any other concerns?**

13 A. Among the notable ones, the incumbent raises concerns about Backcountry Travels'
14 ability to provide safe service given that Backcountry Travels lacks a second boat to use
15 for rescue operations in case of trouble with its boat. The incumbent also has concerns
16 about whether Backcountry Travels can provide service for a full year based on
17 suspicions about the numbers offered by Backcountry Travels.

18

19 **Q. Did Staff come to a conclusion about whether public convenience and necessity**
20 **require allowing Backcountry Travels to operate a commercial public ferry service**
21 **on Lake Chelan?**

22 A. Yes.

23

1 **Q. What is that conclusion?**

2 A. Staff concludes that public convenience and necessity require approval of Backcountry
3 Travels' application for a certificate.

4

5 **Q. Why did Staff reach that conclusion?**

6 A. Staff based its conclusion on the number of comments from local residents and from
7 visitors to the area supporting Backcountry Travels' application, which collectively
8 indicate a need for the service Backcountry Travels seeks to provide.

9

10 **Q. Does this conclude your testimony?**

11 A. Yes.

12

13