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To Whom It May Concern:

For the past five years (at least), my sixth grade students at Herberg Middle School in Pittsfield have benefited from what we affectionately call the "Hoosie Canoe Trip" presented by Gayle Tardif-Raser.

This is not your typical field trip. It's an in-depth, valuable environmental adventure.

Unlike the affluent communities that surround Pittsfield, many of our students come from low socio-economic backgrounds. These kids with less get to see less of what makes the Berkshires beautiful and special, including the bucolic parts of the Housatonic River. Their perception of this waterway is that it's a polluted stream running through town carrying shopping carts, tires and inedible fish. True perhaps, in some sections, but it's also a river rich in history with a rich ecosystem. No one could highlight the positive aspects of our local, underrated jewel better than Mrs. Raser. She is a walking, talking, canoeing encyclopedia.

More than that, the way Gayle conveys her knowledge and balanced opinions about the river leaves students interested and pleased, yet concerned. She does this skillfully in the classroom, outside on the school grounds and on the Hoosie.

I mentioned something above about the less-than-affluent kids because its in their eyes that I most dramatically see the wonder, the awe once they start paddling downstream. They haven't been to the Caribbean with their parents or even Cape Cod. And they're probably not going anytime soon. But the nice parts of the Housatonic River are right here, a bike ride away. They just didn't know it. Thanks to this program, now they do.

No one is ever disappointed with the trip even those who those with more who have travelled more, or have been on Lenox river section before. The real disappointment would arise if this program was discontinued. Please keep it going.....keep it flowing.

Sincerely and Appreciatively,

Paul Kelly

Teacher- Herberg Middle School