1	HONORABLE RONALD B. LEIGHTON		
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7	IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT		
8	FOR THE WESTERN DISTRICT OF WASHINGTON AT TACOMA		
9	LLOYD CLEMANS, on behalf of himself and		
10	all similarly situated persons and entities,	CASE NO. 3:12-cv-05186	
11	Plaintiffs,	ORDER AND FINAL JUDGMENT (1)	
12	v.	GRANTING FINAL APPROVAL OF CLASS	
13	NEW WEDNER GO AND WEDNER GO	SETTLEMENT; (2) FINALLY CERTIFYING SETTLEMENT CLASS;	
14	NEW WERNER CO. d/b/a WERNER CO., a Delaware corporation;	AND (3) FINALLY APPROVING THE	
15	NEW WERNER HOLDING CO (DE), LLC d/b/a WERNER HOLDING CO.; a Delaware	PROPOSED NOTICE PLAN AND FORMS OF NOTICE	
16	corporation;		
17	LOWE'S COMPANIES, INC., a North Carolina corporation; and		
18	LOWE'S HOME CENTERS, INC., a North Carolina corporation		
19	Defendants.		
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21	This matter came before this Court on November 22, 2013, for a final approval hearing		
22	for the settlement embodied in the Class Action Settlement Agreement, dated June 27, 2013		
23	(the "Settlement Agreement") between Plaintiff Lloyd Clemans ("Plaintiff") against Defendants		
24	Werner Co., New Werner Holding Co., Inc. (collectively "Werner"), Lowe's HIW Inc. and		
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	[PROPOSED] ORDER AND FINAL JUDGMENT (1) GRANTING FINAL APPROVAL OF CLASS SETTLEMENT; (2) FINALLY CERTIFYING SETTLEMENT CLASS; AND (3) FINALLY APPROVING THE PROPOSED NOTICE PLAN AND FORMS OF NOTICE - 1  TOUSLEY BRAIN STEPHENS PLLC 1700 Seventh Avenue, Suite 2200 Seattle, Washington 98101 TEL. 206.682.5600 • FAX 206.682.299		

Lowe's Home Centers, Inc. (collectively "Lowe's"). The Class Action Complaint alleges that beginning in 2003, Werner n/k/a Old Ladder Co. (now bankrupt) began the manufacture and/or distribution of a Steel "Easy Access Attic Ladder" in Model Numbers S2208 and S2210, Marks 1, 2, 3 or 4 (the "Ladders") which contained defective zinc hinges that are prone to breaking and shearing while the Ladders are being used and thus are not safe to use.

The Plaintiff has filed suit alleging (i) violations of the Washington Consumer Protection Act, RCW 19.86.020 et seq., and the Consumer Protection and/or Unfair Business Practice Acts arising under thirty-three (33) other States and the District of Columbia, (ii) unjust enrichment, (iii) negligent misrepresentation, (iv) fraudulent concealment and (v) violation of Washington's Product Liability Act, chapter 7.72 RCW, et seq.

Werner and Lowe's both maintain that they did not manufacture the Ladders and, instead, the Ladders were made by a defunct company that properly went through bankruptcy and, thus, discharged any liability asserted herein with respect to the Ladders. Defendants further maintain that the Ladders were not defective and that any product failures consumers experienced were caused by improper installation or usage. Lastly, Defendants maintain that they were unaware of the alleged defect.

The parties have resolved this dispute and the proposed Class Action Settlement provides a mechanism for Class Members to receive a new Werner attic replacement ladder but does not release any personal injury claims.

On July 25, 2013, this Court entered an Order (1) Granting Preliminary Approval to the Proposed Settlement; (2) Provisionally Certifying the Proposed Settlement Class; (3)

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Werner and Lowe's are jointly referred to further in this Order as "Defendants". Plaintiff and the Defendants are jointly referred to herein as the "Parties."

Approving the Proposed Notice Plan and Forms of Notice; and (4) Scheduling the Final Fairness Hearing for November 22, 2013 (the "Preliminary Approval Order").

On October 28, 2013, in conjunction with Plaintiffs' Motion for Final Approval of Class Action Settlement, Phil Cooper of Kurtzman Carson Consultants, LLC ("KCC"), the Court-approved Settlement Administrator and notice provider in this matter, filed a declaration confirming the timely distribution to the Settlement Class of the Class Notice, Claim Form, and Publication Notice required by the Preliminary Approval Order. Of approximately 300,000 Class Members, only four (4) individuals have opted out. (Cooper Decl. at ¶ 17). A complete and accurate list of Class Members who opted out is attached to this Order as **Exhibit A** and are not bound by this Court's further Orders in this litigation. Those Class Members on Exhibit A shall not share in the benefits of the Settlement.

On November 22, 2013, this Court held a fully noticed formal fairness hearing to consider whether to grant final approval to the Settlement, and to consider Class Counsel's application for an award of attorneys' fees and costs. The Court conducted a hearing, during which the Court heard argument from the parties and all others who appeared, whether represented by counsel or not.

Having read, reviewed and considered the papers filed with this Court, the oral arguments of counsel, and the written and oral comments of all those who have appeared in these proceedings, and based on its familiarity with this matter, this Court finds and concludes as follows:

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# I. THE CLASS NOTICE COMPLIED WITH THIS COURT'S ORDERS AND APPLICABLE LEGAL STANDARDS & THIS COURT HAS JURISDICTION

This Court has jurisdiction over the claims of the Class Members asserted in this action, personal jurisdiction over the settling parties (including the Class Members), and subject matter jurisdiction to approve this Settlement. On July 25, 2013, this Court ordered that Class Notice be disseminated in substantially the form submitted by Plaintiffs at the preliminary approval hearing, and further specified the manner in which such dissemination should occur. Based upon the uncontroverted proof that KCC submitted to the Court, this Court finds that the settling parties have complied with the Court's Orders, as follows:

The Court-approved Class Notice was mailed directly to 15,408 potential Class Members whose addresses were available through Werner's business records. (Cooper Decl. at ¶ 14). The Class Notice also appeared in nationally distributed editions of *People* magazine and *U.S. Today* and a summary notice was distributed over PR NEWSWIRE announcing the settlement to media outlets across the country. (*Id.* at ¶ 13). The Settlement Administrator also caused a summary notice to be placed in Internet banner advertising through 24/7 Real Media Networks advertising network. Lowe's also directed the posting of the Publication Notice in its approximately 1,700 retail stores.

Further, the Settlement Administrator established a Court-approved website, www.atticladdersettlement.com, where Class Members could and can download Claim Forms and obtain information regarding the Settlement. The website was registered with hundreds of search engines to ensure that it was easy to find on the internet. The Claims Administrator also established a toll-free number for Class Members to learn more about the Settlement.

The Settlement Administrator also provided notice of the Settlement Agreement to the U.S. Attorney General and the Attorney Generals of all fifty states and the District of Columbia, as required by 28 U.S.C. § 1715(b). (Cooper Decl. at ¶ 21). The Court finds and concludes that the Class Notice and the notice program as a whole provided the best practicable notice to the members of the Class under the circumstances, and satisfies the requirements prescribed by the United States Supreme Court. *See, Phillips Petroleum Co. v. Shutts* (1985) 472 U.S. 797, 811-12; *Eisen v Carlisle and Jacqueline*, 417 U.S. 156, 174-175 (1974). The Notice clearly described the boundaries of the Class definition, the basis for the lawsuit, the terms and provisions of the Settlement, the remedies available to Class Members, the proposed method for benefit distribution, the proposed amount of the Named Plaintiff service award, and the requested amount for attorneys' fees and costs. *See, Churchill Village, LLC v. General Electric*, 361 F.3d 566, 576 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir. 20040("Notice is satisfactory if it generally describes the terms of the settlement in sufficient detail to alert those with adverse viewpoints to investigate and to come forward and be heard").

The Notice described the proposed Settlement with enough specificity to allow each Class Member to make an informed choice whether to (a) accept and participate in it, (b) to opt out of it to preserve the right to bring a separate action, or (c) to object to it. The Notice explained the procedure by which a Class Member could take any such action. Finally, the Notice provided the schedule for the Final Fairness Hearing, and informed Class Members how to obtain additional information from Class Counsel or the Claims Administrator about the Settlement. Accordingly, the Court finds and concludes that the method and content of the Notice satisfied all applicable legal requirements.

### II. THE SETTLEMENT IS FAIR, ADEQUATE AND REASONABLE

When considering a motion for final approval of a class action settlement under Rule 23, the court's inquiry is whether the settlement is "fair, adequate, and reasonable." *Class Plaintiffs v. City of Seattle*, 955 F.2d 1268, 1276 (9th Cir. 1992); *Linney v. Cellular Alaska P'ship*, 151 F.3d 1234, 1242 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir. 1998). A settlement is fair, adequate, and reasonable when "the interests of the class as a whole are better served if the litigation is resolved by the settlement rather than pursued." MANUAL FOR COMPLEX. LITIG., Fourth, § 30.42 (2004). The decision to approve or reject a proposed settlement is committed to the Court's sound discretion. *See, City of Seattle*, 955 F.2d at 1276; *see also, Linney*, 955 F.3d at 1242.

In affirming the settlement approved by the trial court in *City of Seattle*, the Ninth Circuit noted that it "need not reach any ultimate conclusions on the contested issues of fact and law which underlie the merits of the dispute, for it is the very uncertainty of outcome in litigation and avoidance of wasteful and expensive litigation that induce consensual settlements." *Id.* at 1291 (internal quotations and citations omitted). The district court's ultimate determination "will involve a balancing of several factors," which may include:

the strength of plaintiffs' case; the risk, expense, complexity, and likely duration of further litigation; the risk of maintaining class action status throughout the trial; the amount offered in settlement; the extent of discovery completed, and the stage of the proceedings; the experience and views of counsel . . . and the reaction of the class members to the proposed settlement.

Id. (quoting Officers for Justice v. Civil Serv. Comm'n, 688 F.2d 615, 625 (9th Cir. 1982)).

This Court begins its analysis with a presumption that a class settlement is fair and should be approved if it is the product of arm's-length negotiations conducted by capable counsel with extensive experience in complex class action litigation. *See*, *M. Berenson Co. v.* 

Faneuil Hall Marketplace, 671 F. Supp. 819, 822 (D. Mass. 1987). Each of these factors is present here: Class Counsel has extensive experience in class action litigation, and they reached the Settlement with Defendants only after instituting litigation and conducting extensive investigation into factual merit of Class Claims and after extensive arm's-length negotiations and multiple settlement conferences concerning specific terms of the Settlement.

Further, the Court has considered each of the factors set forth in *City of Seattle* to determine whether the proposed Settlement warrants final approval. The Court finds, based on the record submitted, that the Settlement is fair, adequate, and reasonable in light of, *inter alia*, the following factors:

# A. <u>The Value Of The Settlement, And The Substantial Benefits It Provides To Class Members</u>

The Settlement provides relief for all of the approximately 300,000 Class Members in the United States who currently own a Werner Model S2208 or S2210 steel attic ladder designated as Marks 1, 2, 3 or 4 regardless of whether such Class Member has experienced a product failure. All Class Members who submit a valid Claim Form will receive a free comparable replacement ladder shipped directly to their homes.

### B. The Settlement Serves The Interests of Class Members

Absent the Settlement, Plaintiffs would have had to obtain a class judgment against Defendants, including obtaining class certification covering the entire Class and prevailing on their legal claims. Such an outcome was by no means guaranteed. Indeed, based on the Declaration of Class Counsel, Werner had asserted that it did not actually manufacturer the ladder at issue in this litigation, contends the actual manufacturer has been discharged from liability in prior bankruptcy proceedings and that it bought the assets of the manufacturer free and clear from the bankruptcy estate. Moreover, the outcome of trial and any appeals are

inherently uncertain and involve significant delay. The Settlement avoids these challenges and provides prompt, substantial relief for Class Members, which weighs in favor of final approval of the Settlement.

## C. The Amount of Investigation Completed At the Time of Settlement

By the time the parties reached the Settlement, they had compiled sufficient information and conducted extensive analyses to assess the strengths and weaknesses of their respective cases. Specifically, Class Counsel reviewed thousands of documents, and, together with Plaintiffs' experts, inspected multiple ladders to assess the nature and scope of the alleged defect. In addition, Class Counsel reviewed and extensively analyzed Werner's claims regarding the bankruptcy discharge issues surrounding the true manufacturer of the ladder at issue. By the time the Settlement was reached, the Parties had sufficient legal and factual bases to make a thorough appraisal of the adequacy of the Settlement.

# D. The Terms And Conditions Of The Proposed Settlement

The Settlement provides all eligible Class Members with a free comparable replacement ladder shipped directly to their homes. The straight-forward claims process applies equally to all Class Members, and assistance is available—from Class Counsel and the Claims Administrator—for Class Members who need help in establishing eligibility for relief under the Settlement.

#### E. The Views of Class Counsel

When assessing the fairness of a proposed settlement, the court must consider the views and experience of counsel. *Hanlon v. Chrysler Corp.*, 150 F.3d 1011, 1026 (9th Cir. 1998); *Pincay Invs. Co. v. Covad Communs. Group, Inc.*, 90 Fed. Appx. 510, 511 (9<sup>th</sup> Cir. Cal 2004). Class Counsel in this case, who are experienced and skilled in class action litigation, support

the Settlement as fair, reasonable, and adequate, and in the best interests of the Class as a whole. Based on a review of Class Counsel's credentials and their bases for supporting the Settlement, the Court finds that this factor weighs in favor of Settlement approval.

# F. The Expense And Likely Duration Of Litigation In The Absence Of A Settlement

Another factor courts consider in assessing the fairness of settlements is the complexity, expense, and likely duration of the litigation had a settlement not been reached. *City of Seattle*, 955 F.2d at 1291. As discussed above, the Settlement guarantees a substantial recovery for the Class while obviating the need for lengthy, uncertain, and expensive pretrial practice, trial, and appeals. Even if the Class prevailed at trial, Defendants would likely appeal any adverse rulings against it. Absent the proposed Settlement, Class Members would likely not obtain relief, if any, for a period of years.

### G. The Presence Of Good Faith And The Absence Of Collusion

Courts should also consider the presence of good faith and the absence of collusion on the part of the settling parties. Alba Conte & Herbert B. Newberg, Newberg on Class Actions § 11.43 (4th ed. 2002). There is no indication of collusion or bad faith here, nor any allegations thereof. Furthermore, courts recognize that arm's-length negotiations conducted by competent counsel are prima facie evidence of fair settlements. *In re Consolidated Pinnacle West Securities*, 51 F.3d 194, 197 n.6 (9th Cir. 1995); *see also Berenson*, 671 F. Supp. at 822 (holding that where "a proposed class settlement has been reached after meaningful discovery, after arm's-length negotiations by capable counsel, it is presumptively fair"). (*See* D.E. 65 and 68, Declarations of Stephens and Watson, respectively).

The proposed Settlement here is the result of intensive, arm's-length negotiations between experienced attorneys who are highly familiar with class action litigation in general

and with the legal and factual issues of this case in particular. Multiple settlement conferences resulted in a tentative agreement-in-principle reached on or around March 8, 2013. After reaching this agreement, the parties conducted confirmatory discovery and continued to negotiate in detail and in good faith over the months that followed to finalize the Settlement Agreement.

# H. <u>Class Members' Positive Reaction Supports Final Approval</u>

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the Settlement has already received a positive response from the Class. The reaction of class members to a proposed settlement is an important factor in determining whether a settlement is fair, adequate, and reasonable. *City of Seattle*, 955 F.2d at 1291. A court may appropriately infer that a class action settlement is fair, adequate, and reasonable when few class members object to it. *See, e.g., Marshall v. Holiday Magic, Inc.*, 550 F.2d 1173, 1178 (9th Cir. 1977). Indeed, a court can approve a class action settlement as fair, adequate, and reasonable even over the objections of a significant percentage of class members. *See, City of Seattle*, 955 F.2d at 1291-96.

Only one objection was lodged against the proposed Settlement by a one Robert A.

Roper, in which he asserts that he will not be able to install the replacement ladder on his own and, thus, implies that the Settlement should include his anticipated installation costs. (D.E. 57). Subsequently, Mr. Roper withdrew his objection, asking the Court to fully approve all aspects of the proposed settlement. (*See*, D. E. 71, Ex. A attached thereto). The Court accepts Mr. Roper's withdrawal. Even in the absence of such withdrawal, however, the Court finds that this single objection is without merit given, *inter alia*, that the subject ladders were originally sold on a "do-it-yourself" basis and did not included the consumer's cost of installation. Further, given the exceptional relief provided to the Class and the fact that the

Settlement represents a compromise, the lack of providing installation costs (which would vary widely throughout the nation for each Class Member and, thus, would be unmanageable) does not defeat the fairness of the proposed Settlement.

In addition, the named class representative supports the Settlement. Further, out of an estimated three hundred thousand Class Members, only four (4) have opted out of the Settlement. The scarcity of objections and requests to opt out of the Settlement both indicate the broad, class-wide support for the Settlement and support its approval. The Court finds the overwhelming non-opposition to and participation in the Settlement as strong indications of Class Members' support for the Settlement as fair, adequate, and reasonable.

I. Class Counsel Seek Reasonable Fees And A Reasonable Service Award

One final matter for the Court to consider in granting final approval to the Settlement is the issue of attorneys' fees and costs and a service award to the Class Representative. The Court has considered and awarded Class Counsel's attorneys' fees and costs and a Service Award by separate Order. Accordingly, the entire matter of the proposed Settlement having been duly noticed, and having been fully considered by the Court,

### IT IS HEREBY FOUND, ORDERED, ADJUDGED AND DECREED THAT:

- 1. Unless otherwise provided herein, all capitalized terms in this Order shall have the same meaning as set forth in the Settlement Agreement (the "Settlement Agreement"), previously filed with this Court.
- 2. The Court finds that notice to the Settlement Class has been completed in conformity with the Preliminary Approval Order. The Court finds that this notice was the best notice practicable under the circumstances, that it provided due and adequate notice of the proceedings and of the matters set forth therein, and that it fully satisfied all applicable

requirements of law and due process.

- The Court finds it has personal and subject matter jurisdiction over all claims asserted in the Class Complaint with respect to all members of the Settlement Class.
- 4. The settlement of this Class action on the terms set forth in the Settlement Agreement is approved as being fair, adequate and reasonable in light of the degree of recovery obtained in relation to the risks faced by the Settlement Class in litigating the claims. The Settlement Class is properly certified as a class as part of this settlement. The relief with respect to the Settlement Class is appropriate, as to the individual members of the Settlement Class and as a whole.
- 5. The settlement is binding on all members of the Settlement Class. The Settlement Class is defined as: all individual persons or entities in the United States who currently own a Werner Model S2208 or S2210 steel attic ladder designated as Marks 1, 2, 3 or 4 (an attic ladder which was manufactured from September 2003 to September 2005 and contains one or more cast zinc hinges). Excluded from the Class are the Judge assigned to this matter and any member of the Judge's staff and immediate family. As indicated and specifically defined in the Settlement Agreement, claims for personal injury are specifically excluded from the Settlement and are not being released in this litigation. This Class satisfies the requirements of Rule 23 and is properly certified pursuant to Rule 23(b)(3) for the purposes of settlement.
- 6. Class Members, except those listed on Exhibit A, must submit a valid, verified Claim Form in accordance with the terms of the Settlement Agreement and Claim Form,

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including proof of purchase or the ladder label, to the Settlement Administrator by January 21, 2013.

- 7. All members of the Settlement Class are bound by the terms of the Settlement Agreement. As of the Effective Date, all Class Members shall conclusively be deemed to have released all settled claims as described in the Settlement Agreement, which provides: "Plaintiff, and all other Class Members who have not excluded themselves from the Settlement, hereby expressly release and forever discharge Defendants and all of their present, former, and future officers, directors, employees, shareholders, agents, predecessors, successors, assigns, parents, subsidiaries, affiliates, insurers, attorneys, heirs and legal representatives ("Releasees") of and from any and all Released Claims (as defined in Section 19) and agree that they shall not now or hereafter initiate, maintain, or assert against any of the Releasees any causes of action, claims, rights, demands, or claims for equitable, legal, and/or administrative relief connected with, arising out of, or related to the Released Claims in any court or before any administrative body (including any state department, regulatory agency, or organization), tribunal, arbitration panel, or other adjudicating body" Notwithstanding the foregoing, no claims are released hereunder for personal bodily injury or any claim arising out of any personal bodily injury claim arising out of or in connection with the use, maintenance or ownership of the S2208 or S2210 ladders, including, but not limited to, claims for mental distress, loss of consortium, and medical expenses.
- 8. As of the Effective Date, Plaintiff and all Class Members, except those listed on Exhibit A, whether or not they return a Claim Form within the time and in the manner provided for, shall be barred from asserting any Released Claims against Defendants and the Releasees,

and any such Class Members shall have released any and all Released Claims as against Defendants and the Releasees.

- 9. All Class Members, except those listed on Exhibit A, are hereby forever barred and enjoined from filing, commencing, prosecuting, intervening in, continuing or participating as a plaintiff, claimant or class member in any lawsuit or administrative, regulatory, arbitration, or other proceeding in any jurisdiction based on, relating to, or arising out of the claims and causes of action, or the facts and circumstances alleged in the *Clemans* Action and/or relating to Released Claims. The Settlement Agreement and this Order are binding on and have res judicata and preclusive effect in all pending and future lawsuits or other proceedings encompassed by the Release maintained by or on behalf of Plaintiff and all Class Members, as well as their heirs, executors and administrators, successors and assigns.
- 10. Neither this Order nor any aspect of this settlement is to be construed or deemed an admission of liability, culpability, negligence, or wrongdoing on the part of any Defendant. In particular, and without limiting the generality of the foregoing, nothing in this Order or in this settlement shall be offered or construed as an admission of, or evidence of, liability, wrongdoing, impropriety, responsibility or fault whatsoever by Defendants or their employees and agents. In addition, and also without limiting the generality of the foregoing, nothing about this Order or the settlement shall be offered or construed as an admission or evidence of the propriety or feasibility of certifying a class in any other action for adversarial, rather than settlement, purposes.
- 11. Defendants and Defendants' counsel shall have no liability whatsoever for any acts or omissions of the Settlement Administrator or Class Counsel other than to pay for the

costs and expenses of the Settlement Administrator in disseminating the Class Notice and administering the Settlement.

- 12. Pursuant to Rule 54(b) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure, the Clerk shall enter final judgment dismissing this action on the merits with prejudice and without costs or attorney fees to any party (except as otherwise provided in this Court's Order Granting Class Counsel's Application For Award of Attorneys' Fees and Expenses and Incentive Award to the Named Plaintiff), there being no just reason for the delay in the entry of this Order and Final Judgment. The claims that are thereby dismissed shall include all claims encompassed by the release set out in the Settlement Agreement.
- 13. The dismissal of this case is without prejudice to the rights of the parties to enforce the terms of the Settlement Agreement and the rights of Class Counsel to seek attorney fees, costs, and service awards to the named Plaintiffs as provided in the Settlement Agreement. Without affecting the finality of this Order, or the judgment to be entered pursuant hereto, in any way, the Court retains jurisdiction over Plaintiff, the Class Members and Defendants as to all matters relating to the administration, consummation, enforcement, and interpretation of the terms of the Settlement, the Settlement Agreement, including the Release, this Order, and for any other necessary purposes.

#### IT IS SO ORDERED.

DATED this 22nd day of November, 2013

Ronald B. Leighton

United States District Judge

1	Presented by:	
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26	Counsel for Plaintiff Lloyd Clemans,	
20	and the Settlement Class Members	
	[PROPOSED] ORDER AND FINAL JUDGMENT (1) GRANTING FINAL	APPROVAL OF
	CLASS SETTLEMENT; (2) FINALLY CERTIFYING SETTLEMENT	TOUSLEY BRAIN STEPHENS PLLC
	CLASS; AND (3) FINALLY APPROVING THE PROPOSED	1700 Seventh Avenue, Suite 2200
	NOTICE PLAN AND FORMS OF NOTICE - 16	Seattle, Washington 98101 TEL. 206.682.5600 • FAX 206.682.2992

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1	EXHIBT A – LIST OF INDIVIDUALS EXCLUDED FROM THIS ACTION		
2	1. James H. Bandish		
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4	2. John Bellinger		
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6 7	3. John Simpson		
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	[PROPOSED] ORDER AND FINAL JUDGMENT (1) GRANTING FINAL APPROVAL OF		