

Congressman Dave Reichert (WA-08)
House Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands
Hearing on H.R. 608, *Alpine Lakes Wilderness Additions and Pratt and Middle Fork*
Snoqualmie Rivers Protection Act
Testimony for the Record
October 25, 2011

Chairman Bishop, Ranking Member Grijalva, and Members of the Subcommittee – thank you for holding this hearing on the *Alpine Lakes Wilderness Additions and Pratt and Middle Fork Snoqualmie Rivers Protection Act* (H.R. 608), and for allowing me to testify in support of this measure. I would also like to extend my appreciation to the Natural Resources committee for approving the legislation last year and the House passing it unanimously. Additionally, I wanted to mention that Senator Patty Murray has been an outstanding partner in this bipartisan conservation effort, and I am pleased to have her leadership and the support of Senator Maria Cantwell on this bill.

H.R. 608 builds upon the proud Washington State tradition initiated by Senators Warren Magnuson (D-WA), Scoop Jackson (D-WA), and Dan Evans (R-WA) of working together to protect our public lands and preserve recreational opportunities for outdoors enthusiasts. The people of Washington State understand how this bipartisanship works for their lasting benefit: look no further than Mt. Rainier, Olympic, and the North Cascades National Parks to see how these anchors of outdoor recreation are treasured by residents and visitors alike.

The current 394,000-acre Alpine Lakes Wilderness reaches the crest of the Cascade Mountains just east of the Seattle-Bellevue metropolitan area. In 1976, the Alpine Lakes Wilderness was designated by Congress and has become one of the most popular wilderness areas in the country. Now, 30 years later, H.R.608 provides an opportunity to permanently protect key additions to the Alpine Lakes Wilderness in my congressional district that will preserve important wildlife habitats, existing recreational opportunities, and local economies that rely on both. The legislation embraces important lower-elevation lands, completes watersheds, protects two rivers with Wild and Scenic designations (the Pratt and Middle Fork Snoqualmie Rivers), and provides clean water and flood control for the Middle Fork and South Fork valleys. Congressionally-designated Wilderness and Wild and Scenic River designations are the strongest and most durable means to ensure these special areas are preserved for our children and grandchildren to experience.

The Middle Fork and South Fork valleys are the closest and most accessible mountain valleys to residents of the greater Seattle-Bellevue metropolitan area. The proposed additions have been carefully crafted with consideration for existing recreational opportunities for hiking, camping, rafting, kayaking, horseback riding, mountain biking, and wildlife viewing. It also protects a large area of accessible lowland forests, preserving hunting and fishing opportunities in primitive settings.

This proposal also protects an important wildlife habitat that contains abundant elk and deer populations. And although salmon are not present in the Middle Fork, there are substantial populations of resident trout that rely on the streams of the Pratt and Middle Fork Snoqualmie Rivers. These watersheds are sources of clean water, important for downstream fisheries and commercial and residential water users. Preserving the forests as Wilderness would ensure maintenance of flow during the dry summer months, and aid in flood control. The Snoqualmie basin is subject to flood events on a regular basis; the low-elevation forest valleys are critical to controlling run-off rates here and the proposed additions would preserve intact forest ecosystems, protecting against increasing flood severity on downstream infrastructure and residents.

The benefits of the legislation are clear, but the process we engaged in to reach this consensus measure is equally important for the Subcommittee to consider. I am proud of the fact that this legislation is the result of extensive consultation and consensus-building with local stakeholders. Meetings began as early as May 2007, and frequent gatherings to collaborate with elected officials, conservation enthusiasts, recreation groups, and property-rights advocates constructed and modified this proposal to address concerns raised by stakeholders. That is one of many reasons why this and the original proposal enjoys the strong, broad-based local support of 74 elected officials; 115 businesses, ranging from recreational outfitters to restaurants and retailers; 15 hunting and angling groups; 14 recreational groups, including paddlers, bikers, and hikers; 25 conservation organizations; and 68 religious leaders.

This collaborative approach is best exemplified by an agreement worked out between user groups for access to trails along the wilderness boundary. Through discussions with mountain bikers, hikers, and conservationists, a consensus plan was crafted to use the trail adjacent to the proposed wilderness addition on alternate days, so that those hikers seeking a trail

experience without encountering bicyclists could do so on specific days. Here is an innovative resolution to what might otherwise have been a festering controversy. This collaboration is a perfect example of the broad coalition of supporters for this proposal, and the unity of purpose among them in seeking federal designation for these wilderness additions.

The additions made by H.R. 608 to the Alpine Lakes Wilderness Area, combined with the designation of the Middle Fork Snoqualmie River, fit the Washington State tradition of collaborative, consensus-based, environmental stewardship. This wilderness will serve vast, untold numbers of Americans. It serves those who choose to adventure into its quiet valleys and up to its sentinel peaks. Some of those are hardy mountain climbers; for others the adventure is an afternoon walk, grandparents introducing their grandchildren to nature at its most wild and inviting along a quiet, easy wilderness trail. It serves the larger group of wilderness users who take pleasure from the wilderness they view from the Mountains-to-Sound Greenway, an extraordinary corridor of protected federal, state, and private lands offering all kinds of recreational opportunities to those who travel across our state on Interstate 90, which crosses the Cascades just south of the Alpine Lakes Wilderness. Those who savor the wild scenery from more developed sites and roadways are no less users of wilderness than the adventurers who trek to the highest, farther peaks.

Finally, this wilderness serves the future generations for whom we must act today. As a grandfather, I understand that we have a stake today in a future I will not live to see. That is the world in which our grandchildren's children will live their lives, amid whatever kind of landscape we have left them. Count mine as one solid voice on behalf of ensuring that the landscape we bequeath to future generations is one with an abundant, generous, and diverse system of wilderness areas, not only in the most remote stretches of our beautiful country, but right here close to home – in a “backyard wilderness” such as the Alpine Lakes.

I urge you to support this legislation and to approve it for floor consideration. Again, I appreciate your leadership and responsiveness in scheduling this hearing, and I would be pleased to respond to any questions.

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