

Committee on Resources

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Committee on Resources
Subcommittee on Forest and Forest Health
Hearing for H.R. 822

Chairman Walden and Committee Members,

I would like to thank you for allowing the Washington State Snowmobile Association the opportunity to testify on H.R. 822 "Wild Sky".

WSSA became involved almost 3 years ago when several members attended a "Wild Sky work shop" in Monroe, WA on September 6, 2001 and were asked to take action against this legislation. WSSA officials and members wrote letters and sent emails to Congressman Larsen and Senator Murray's offices asking that alternatives be sought out such as a National Recreation Area or a new concept of a Back Country Recreation Area.

On December 5th 2001, members of WSSA met with aides from Congressman Larsen, Congresswoman Dunn, and Senator Murray's offices to discuss the Wilderness area proposal. We supplied maps of the 2001 proposal with overlays that illustrated areas of motorized use. We suggested that for those areas, a National Recreation Area (NRA) would be a more appropriate designation but were informed that the areas we had identified would be too small to manage as NRA's. When we offered the idea of a Back Country Recreation Area we were told that the designation did not exist and that they would not spend the time writing the legislation for it. During the meeting we were told by the Congressman and Senator's Aides that other user groups including Motorcyclists, Mountain Bikers and Horsemen had met with them that day and had conveyed that they had little to no user areas inside the proposed boundaries. They did not foresee any conflict with their recreation and the proposed Wilderness.

After several failed attempts at getting the other motorized groups back at the table WSSA found itself the solitary motorized group in opposition to the proposed legislation. At that point WSSA board members asked that I take the lead and try to negotiate motorized user areas out of the proposal.

I then met several times with Senator Murray's Aides, drawing lines on maps and discussing terrain features. When I brought up any other motorized use of an area I was advised to remember that I was there to inform them only of snowmobile areas. After five months of bargaining WSSA was asked to support the legislation all but one of the snowmobile areas was removed (Eagle Lake, an area pointed to as being essential, included to prevent "cherry stemming"). I replied that WSSA would not support the Wilderness bill, but offered that the Association may agree to remain neutral.

After speaking to several WSSA board members I was directed by the President Glenn Warren to draft a letter agreeing to a stance of neutrality that he then approved for me to deliver to Senator Murray on May 16th 2002.

For clarification, the definition of "neutral" is: not taking sides; not belonging to, favoring, or assisting any side in a war, dispute, contest, or controversy.

Since that time WSSA has haggled over a few boundary lines on the map that were added after the initial agreement, and they have since been removed. WSSA has had some internal turmoil over the neutral stance that the previous board had taken on Wild Sky. Earlier this year at our annual meeting, a motion was made and passed to send a letter to Richard Pombo, as House Resource Committee Chair, stating that in general WSSA does not support wilderness (without specific reference to Wild Sky), and that WSSA questions the validity of the 16,000 acres in the Wild Sky bill that apparently does not meet the wilderness

definition. A member sent a letter out stating that we were opposing Wild Sky without the knowledge of the board, when in fact we were only asking that the Resource Committee take a closer look at the 16,000 acres in question.

I would like to state for the record that the Washington State Snowmobile Association will remain neutral on H.R. 822 "Wild Sky" through the end of this 108th Congress. If this bill does not pass during this Congress and is re-introduced in the 109th Congress WSSA will reconsider its position.

I would like to close by stating that WSSA has worked hard to represent snowmobilers in Washington State, and negotiate a favorable outcome for our membership through involvement in drafting this legislation. While WSSA has agreed not to support nor oppose "Wild Sky", recent opposition from other user groups and local government representatives should indicate that a more careful review may be warranted. It is my sincere hope that you, the Resources Committee, carefully consider and evaluate the concerns brought forth today, knowing that over in Washington, the choices you make will have a very real impact on the people who currently recreate in the area known as "Wild Sky".

Thank you for your time.

Chris Fadden