

# Committee on Resources

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## Statement of Congressman Rick Larsen

Before the

Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health Committee on Resources

11:00 AM, Thursday, July 22 2004,

Room 1334

On H.R. 822, the Wild Sky Wilderness Act

Chairman Walden, Ranking Member Inslee, and members of the subcommittee:

Thank you for holding this hearing on HR 822, the Wild Sky Wilderness Act of 2003. As the bill's prime sponsor, I ask you to support HR 822 and pass it favorably with modifications, which I will discuss in my testimony.

HR 822 represents the next step in a long line of successful bipartisan efforts in Washington state to designate wilderness areas where people can be assured of clean places to hunt and fish in the future. The Wild Sky is a hands-on wilderness.

Congress passed the last wilderness act for Washington state in 1984 when a bipartisan effort brought a bill to President Ronald Reagan for signature that created among other wilderness areas the Henry M. Jackson Wilderness.

It is time to create the next generation of wilderness for Washingtonians.

The Wild Sky Wilderness Act is unique. It is unique in that it includes lowlands around the Skykomish River and its tributaries easily accessible to the surrounding population. As a result, it has earned the support of the Washington Coalition of Citizens with Disabilities. Inclusion of lowlands has the added benefit of providing protection for fish in these tributaries, leading groups like the Wild Steelhead Coalition to endorse it.

The Wild Sky Wilderness Act has strong bipartisan support. Our colleague, Representative Jennifer Dunn, is a co-sponsor. In the packet you will find a letter signed by seven local Republican legislators, including the Washington State Senate Majority Leader. Former Republican Governors and our current Democratic Governor support passage. Likewise, the packet includes a letter of support from Democratic state legislators.

The Wild Sky Wilderness Act has local support. The Mayor of the Town of Index, the closest local government to the proposed wilderness, said he believes the Wild Sky wilderness would be the best thing that ever happened in his valley. The cities of Monroe and Snohomish, both located on Highway 2 heading out to the Wild Sky, have passed resolutions of support.

The Wild Sky Wilderness Act has strong business support. REI, Inc., the nation's largest consumer cooperative with its focus on the outdoor adventure industry, is an endorser as are David and Lynn Meier, co-owners of A Stone's Throw Bed and Breakfast and A Cabin in the Sky vacation rental. Additionally, the Snohomish County Economic Development Council supports the proposal.

I would like to provide two words about the process: inclusiveness and compromise.

My staff and Senator Patty Murray's staff, the prime sponsor in the Senate, have worked over the last three years to answer many of the concerns brought by several groups. The result has been that the original idea

of a 120,000-acre proposal became a 106,000-acre bill proposed in HR 822. Additionally, over the last six weeks, my staff, Senator Murray's staff and Representative George Nethercutt's staff have worked to further refine it.

Although that work is not now reflected in the map that currently accompanies HR 822, I support these changes that cut another 2,500 acres from the bill since they address issues related to roads, private property, snowmobile access and a proposed repeater site.

This inclusiveness has led many outdoor groups to support the bill or express neutrality when they traditionally might have generally opposed wilderness.

As you can tell, the Wild Sky proposal is a product of compromise. I would argue that we are in the "nip and tuck" stage of the proposal and any major changes would represent an "extreme makeover" and undercut the value of this bill.

A recent poll in my district shows that public views the Wild Sky proposal favorably by a 79 percent to 18 percent margin. My office has received 3,684 letters and e-mails in support. I have received 142 against.

I do not want to minimize remaining opposition to the Wild Sky. Nor do I want to overstate it. It should be put in the context of the three years of hard work that has gone into creating this next generation of Washington state wilderness. This work has resulted in a bill that has gained broad support from the local communities, businesses and a strong bipartisan group of elected officials in the best tradition of past Washington wildernesses.

I ask the subcommittee to consider HR 822 with modifications and schedule a mark-up as soon as possible so that we can celebrate the 40th anniversary of the Wilderness Act with an excellent addition to the nation's wilderness areas.