

Statement of the Honorable Slade Gorton  
House Natural Resources Subcommittee  
Federal Lands  
H.R. 1791 Mountains to Sound Greenway National Heritage Area Act  
April 11, 2018

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member and members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased and honored to testify today for H.R. 1791, the Mountains to Sound Greenway National Heritage Area Act.

The proposal for this Mountains to Sound Heritage Act is an expression of the Washington tradition of balanced, bipartisan approach to public lands that contributes to economic growth and allows for continued resource development. That approach was enthusiastically built by my predecessors in Congress, happily adhered to during my career here and is carried forward today by the Washington State delegation. Chairman Doc Hastings passed the Greenway Heritage bill out of this committee in 2014. During this Congress, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources committee worked across the aisle to include the Greenway bill in the compromise Energy and Natural Resources Act.

I believe that Heritage Area designation is important for four reasons: 1) better inter-agency coordination 2) more local involvement in land management 3) rural economic development, and 4) recognition of the value this landscape holds.

The Mountains to Sound Greenway is historically significant because it served as a vital transportation corridor connecting the young Pacific Northwest with the rest of America. In 1864, the largest Federal land grant in American history privatized much of the Greenway landscape in order to capitalize the northern transcontinental railroad. The railroad in turn provided land and access to market for private timber companies like Weyerhaeuser that has led the industry for more

than a century and is still based in the Greenway. The economic legacy of the Greenway landscape continues as companies like Boeing and Microsoft lead the aerospace and technology industries, trading across the country and around the world.

Today the Mountains to Sound Greenway landscape plays another, equally important role in the economic vitality of the region. The Greenway's forests, rivers, lakes and mountains offer residents and visitors unparalleled access to the outdoors for hunting, fishing, camping and hiking. Outdoor recreation in the region drives billions in economic activity and employs thousands of people. For small towns in rural Kittitas County, tourism and recreation present a vital economic development opportunity. And for major employers in the Seattle-Bellevue metropolitan area, easy access to the Greenway's outdoor amenities helps to attract and retain workforce talent.

The Greenway coalition, initially led by my close friend and local civic hero, Jim Ellis, has been successful at preserving and celebrating a landscape of national historic and natural significance. But they face new challenges. As the technology boom in Seattle drives rapid urban population growth, public land managers are being overwhelmed by the demand for access to trails and parks close to where so many people live. At the same time, rural communities that have been left out of the boom are struggling economically and looking for ways to capitalize on the public lands around them.

I see **four ways** that National Heritage Designation can help address these challenges and deliver tangible economic benefit to the region:

1. One, provide **a framework for coordination across disparate land managers** - public lands in the Greenway are managed by a patchwork of agencies from municipal and county parks districts to state natural resources and national forests, each with different mandates, authorities, policies, plans and budgets. A Heritage Area's cooperative management plan provides a

- framework to facilitate cooperation among these various land managers. By sharing resources and working together on common needs and responsibilities, agencies can get more done with less funds.
2. Two, **more local engagement** – federal land managers and local communities should work closely together, but they often don't know how. As a coordinating entity, the Greenway Trust can facilitate community participation in agency planning processes, and mobilize local volunteers and private dollars to match public projects.
  3. Three, **rural economic development** - Currently, too many recreationists just pass through small towns on their way to fish, hunt, or hike. Heritage Area designation would help small towns develop historic, cultural and recreation attractions that can draw in more visitors and spur economic activity.
  4. Four, **recognition that this is a special place** – the Mountains to Sound Greenway is a unique place. It has national significance because of its cultural and natural history, and it is vital for the continued economic and social prosperity of the people who live there. Official recognition as a National Heritage Area will raise awareness, boost local pride, and promote tourism and other investments in the region.

Mr. Chairman, H.R. 1791 is community driven proposal. By consulting with over 1,000 individuals in over 140 public meetings, the Greenway Trust documented community needs and identified the Heritage Area designation as the tool that could best help. Designation would encourage sustainable economic growth without adding any new regulatory authority or other management restrictions on private lands. This legislation explicitly protects the rights and privileges of private property owners, while offering potential benefits from new ways to engage in the management of nearby public lands. To ensure the protection of treaty rights and tribal sovereignty, the Greenway Trust has been working with Tribes to improve legislative language and on-the-ground partnership.

Over two decades, the organization has leveraged millions of dollars of private capital toward public benefit projects. Through this leverage and through better agency coordination, I believe the Heritage Area will produce enormous social and economic benefit and ultimately save public resources.

Here in Washington DC, the proposal has benefitted from the enthusiastic support of its primary sponsor, Congressman Dave Reichert, whose Congressional District covers the majority of the landscape, and all of the other members whose districts overlap the Greenway boundary, including cosponsors Smith, Jayapal and DelBene.

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, H.R. 1791 is a well thought-out approach that has broad local support and will stand the test of time. I urge the Committee to give this legislation positive consideration. In conclusion, I would ask that the Committee include in today's record, the statement by Jon Hoekstra, Executive Director of the Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust.