

Statement of the Honorable Slade Gorton
House Natural Resources Subcommittee
Public Lands and Environmental Regulation
H.R. 1785 Mountains to Sound Greenway National Heritage Area Act
July 29, 2014

Mr. Chairman, Mr. Ranking Member and members of the Subcommittee, I am pleased and honored to testify today for H.R. 1785, 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 legislation to conserve Washington's most treasured public lands while continuing with the responsible economic development of the resources that our lands provide. That approach was enthusiastically built by my predecessors in Congress, happily adhered to during my career here and is carried forward today by Chairman Hastings and his Washington State colleagues.

The proposed Mountains to Sound Greenway Heritage Area in Washington State includes 1.5 million acres on both sides of Interstate 90 from Puget Sound at Seattle, across the crest of the Cascade Mountains, to Ellensburg in Central Washington. The Greenway includes public forests and parks, private rural farms and working forests, and much of the fifteenth-largest metropolitan area in the nation. 900,000 of the 1.5 million acres are public land, but it also includes 1,600 miles of recreational trails, 28 cities, and more than 1.4 million residents. The Greenway provides easy access to outdoor recreation, including hunting, fishing camping and hiking for millions of people, a key to the quality of life in Washington State.

Mr. Chairman, H.R. 1785 is the result of a long, thoughtful process, led by the Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust. The Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust is one of the earliest coalitions to come together to develop a coordinated approach to the interface of public and private lands in a growing urban region. The 1980's marked another Seattle area growth surge, with its new technology industries and an influx of population. Much of this growth would occur along the I-90 corridor east of Seattle. Community leaders, led by my close friend, Jim Ellis, formed a coalition of government agencies, business and other private sector leaders, and community activists to create and implement a common vision that would balance strong economic growth with a conservation ethic and founded the Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust.

Since 1991, 281,454 acres have been conserved and 45,471 citizens have worked as volunteers to plant trees and build trails. During the 1990's this cause became so impressive that, over the course of six years the Congress made appropriations

sufficient to conserve 76,254 acres of land for public use. All of these lands were acquired from willing sellers at market rates, as the Greenway as a voluntary association has never, and will never, take land by the use of eminent domain.

Today, this Trust is a broad coalition that includes major employers including Plum Creek Timber Company, Weyerhaeuser, Puget Sound Energy, Recreational Equipment Inc., Boeing, and Microsoft, as well as local governments and individual citizens, most of which have worked together since 1991.

The decision to move forward with a request for a National Heritage Area was reached after an extensive public involvement process that included 145 meetings and consultation with over 1,000 individuals. This is a proposal that will allow for economic development and conservation to exist side-by-side. This legislation will NOT add any new regulatory authority or other management restrictions over private lands. It will NOT require any private land owner to provide public access to its land or require it to participate in any activity conducted by the Heritage Area. It will NOT affect water, hunting, or fishing rights, nor will it add federal government oversight over local management decisions, nor does it legislate acquisition of new public lands. What this does do is to demonstrate the national significance of this landscape, provide national recognition to the work and dedication of those tens of thousands of volunteers, and empower local communities to unite to increase tourism and economic activity.

Here in Washington DC, it has benefitted from the enthusiastic support of its primary sponsor, Congressman Dave Reichert, whose Congressional District includes the largest portion of the Trust area, and all of the other members whose districts include portions of that area, members Del Bene, McDermott and Smith. All of them have the gratitude of the Trust

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee, H.R. 1785 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 Cynthia Welti, Executive Director of the Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust.