

ADDITIONAL VIEWS

H.R. 2806 is a limited bill that allows for continued public access to the North Cascades National Park from the community of Stehekin, Washington.

Stehekin, located at the western end of Lake Chelan, is the gateway to the North Cascades National Park and is accessible only by boat, floatplane, or a multi-day hike. From the town of Stehekin, the Stehekin Valley Road has long allowed residents and visitors to access some of the most beautiful scenery in the North Cascades in what is now the Park's Stephen Mather Wilderness.

At the July 30, 2009 hearing before the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands, the Subcommittee heard testimony from local officials on how flood damage to the upper Stehekin Road has limited public recreational access to the North Cascades National Park Complex. This reduced access has been particularly painful for the small, tourist-dependent community of Stehekin which serves as the gateway to the Park.

Recognizing its value to local residents and tourists, the Road was specifically protected when the Park and Wilderness areas were created. Stehekin Road has for many years been maintained and run by Park officials, but following extreme flooding and subsequent changes in the course of the river, much of the Road bed is now under water. Because the Road occupies a narrow corridor within the borders of the Wilderness Area, congressional approval is required to modify the corridor prior to the Park Service rebuilding the road.

During legislative consideration of the Park's creation in 1988, Congress determined that Stehekin Road would remain exempt from the restrictions of other wilderness areas. Otherwise, no cars, mountain bikes or other mechanized vehicles would have been allowed to transport area residents or Park visitors to the wilderness areas north of the Stehekin community. Former U.S. Senator and Washington Governor Dan Evans, the author of the 1988 Act creating the Park, submitted written testimony that it was Congress' intent to allow for continued road access into the Park.

As the Stehekin River has shifted and damaged the road, the Park Service has been unable to rebuild the road out of the path of the river because of the narrow road corridor in the original Park designation. H.R. 2806 would simply allow the Secretary limited authority to adjust the road corridor out of the path of the Stehekin River, with no net loss of land to either the Park or the Stephen Mather Wilderness. These changes and road rebuilding would still be subject to review and comment under the National Environmental Policy Act.

In addition to the merits of adjusting the road corridor boundary to enable maintenance of this grandfathered access road, the Subcommittee hearing also revealed troubling inconsistencies in the

Park Service's position on road maintenance. This Committee recently approved a bill, H.R. 1061 authored by Mr. Dicks of Washington, which gives away 36 acres of the Olympic National Park without compensation and for the purpose of ensuring road access. In a July 9, 2009 letter to Mr. Bishop, Acting Director Wenk of the Park Service endorsed the road and land giveaway in H.R. 1061. However, Mr. Wenk testified against H.R. 2806, which will result in no net loss of park or wilderness area, citing "higher priorities."

Approval of H.R. 2806 will serve as a reminder to the Park Service that ensuring public access to the National Park System remains a high priority and it will ensure that we keep our nation's commitment to the residents of Stehekin. Moreover, H.R. 2806 accomplishes these goals without any net loss to the Park or the Wilderness, and ensures adequate public and environmental review before any changes take place.

DOC HASTINGS.

DANIEL J. EVANS,
5215 NORTH EAST 45TH,
Seattle, WA, July 7, 2009.

Hon. RAUL M. GRIJALVA,
Chairman, Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Land, Committee on Natural Resources, Washington, DC.

DEAR MR. CHAIRMAN: I am pleased to write in favor of H.R. 2806 sponsored by Representative Doc Hastings of the state of Washington. I believe his proposal for reconstruction of the Upper Stehekin road is both desirable and vital for appropriate access to portions of the North Cascade National Park.

Before speaking on the particulars of the road reconstruction let me establish my credentials for testifying on this measure. I served as United States Senator for the state of Washington from 1983 to 1989. During that time I served as a member of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee of the Senate, which has jurisdiction over our National Park system. While on the committee I initiated and became prime sponsor of a bill to create wilderness areas within the three national parks of Washington state, Olympic, Rainier, and North Cascades. It was my intent to ensure that undue development would not occur within those national parks. I also recognized that access to trails and vistas within those parks was vital and carefully excluded those road rights-of-way from wilderness boundaries. Normally, road reconstruction and minor relocation would be accommodated within these 100 foot right of ways but on rare occasions natural catastrophes could require modification of wilderness boundaries to allow road relocations.

For almost 70 years I have hiked and climbed in the National Parks of Washington state and have a strong and continuing desire to maintain their integrity. I am very familiar with the area in question and have ridden the road from Stehekin to trailheads where I have embarked on extensive hiking and climbing trips. If this road is not rebuilt, access to extraordinary wilderness experiences will be substantially more difficult. Almost a full days' hike will be necessary to reach what once were trailheads giving mountain access.

I believe very strongly that continued protection of our wilderness National Parks depends on the active support of visitors, hikers, and climbers who act as champions for our National Parks. If we make access substantially more difficult we reduce the number of visitors and ultimately the numbers of citizens and taxpayers who know enough about these parks to want to protect them.

It was my intent when I sponsored the Park Wilderness Bill of 1988 to protect the unique features of these splendid Parks but not to make access more difficult for those seeking the unusual experience of a wilderness Park. I believe that in this instance an alternative route along the Old Wagon Road would maintain the appropriate access and that portions of the current road could revert to wilderness category with no net loss of wilderness area. I strongly urge the passage of HR 2806 and believe it is compatible with the original bill I sponsored in 1988.

I thank you for your attention to this matter and hope that it can be resolved promptly and successfully.

Sincerely

DANIEL J. EVANS,
U.S. Senator 1983–1989.

