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Testimony on H.R. 2719  
The Rattlesnake Mountain Public Access Act  
House Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Fisheries, Wildlife, Oceans and Insular Affairs  
October 25, 2011

Good afternoon Chairman Fleming and members of the Subcommittee. First, thank you for inviting me to speak on this very important topic – public access to Rattlesnake Mountain, including the summit. I also want to express our appreciation to the full-Committee chairman (and our Congressman), Doc Hastings, for his leadership on this legislation.

For the record my name is Carl Adrian, I am President and CEO of the Tri-City Development Council or TRIDEC. TRIDEC is the lead economic development organization serving a two-county region in Southeast Washington State. The Tri-Cities has a population of 258,000 and includes the communities of Kennewick, Pasco, Richland and West Richland. TRIDEC has about 350 member firms and contractual relationships with the cities, counties and local port districts.

I am here to speak to you about why public access to Rattlesnake Mountain is so important.

Rattlesnake Mountain is a 3,660 foot windswept treeless sub-alpine ridge overlooking the Hanford nuclear site. Prior to 1943 nearly all the mountain was in private ownership and much of the western slope remains in private hands today.

In 1943, the summit and entire eastern slope was taken by eminent domain and placed in federal ownership under the Manhattan Project. Today the eastern slope of Rattlesnake Mountain remains under federal protection as part of the Hanford Reach National Monument, managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The public has not been allowed on Rattlesnake Mountain, except when escorted by federally badged individuals. For the few of us that have been escorted to the summit (and Congressman Hastings and I experienced our first trip to the top together) the vistas are breathtaking. You can see:

- To the south the state of Oregon
- To the west the Cascade Mountains including Mt. Rainier, Mt. Hood, and Mt. Adams
- To the east the confluence of the Yakima and Columbia rivers and the confluence of the Snake and Columbia rivers -- a historical campsite of Lewis and Clark
- The Tri-Cities communities and our surrounding patchwork of vineyards and agricultural areas

- The entire 586 square miles of the Hanford site including the reactor sites and processing canyons. Imagine viewing an area half the size of Rhode Island.
- And a magnificent view of the geology of the Columbia river valley and Columbia gorge formed by the ice age floods some 13,000 years ago.

Rattlesnake Mountain was never contaminated by the nuclear missions at Hanford and as the site is cleaned up, it's only appropriate the highest vista for viewing the site and the surrounding area be open for public access.

The community embraces the cultural and historical significance of Rattlesnake Mountain and believes that public access for everyone is the best way to preserve the heritage of this place.

For the first time the Tri-Cities can actually see an end to the clean-up of ninety percent of the Hanford site. Almost two years ago, TRIDEC began a community conversation regarding the future of the Hanford site.

In a letter to the Department of Energy, signed by myself along with mayors of our four principal cities, the chairmen of both county commissions, the executive directors of three local port districts, and Hanford communities, we asked DOE among other things to recognize that the natural features of the Hanford site, and in particular Rattlesnake Mountain and the Reach National Monument, are important community assets national treasures where the public must be allowed access.

Subsequent to the letter, TRIDEC along with our local newspaper, the *Tri-City Herald*, sponsored a series of community forums asking the public for their vision of the future of the Hanford site. One hundred and fifty Tri-Citians attended these forums in person and another 200 filled out an on-line survey. Aside from one gentleman who thought the Hanford site should be turned into a zoo (similar to Jurassic park, without the dinosaurs) there were three common themes which were voiced at every meeting and in most surveys.

One of the common themes is that the public wants access to the entire Reach National Monument including Rattlesnake Mountain, and other historical structures and geologic features.

To understand what access to the summit of Rattlesnake Mountain could mean to our community, we need to only look 15 miles to the south of Rattlesnake, to Badger Mountain, which is about 1/3 the height of Rattlesnake. The 650-acre summit of Badger Mountain was purchased by the community several years ago to preserve the mountain for public access. Last year more than 120,000 hikers climbed to the 1,000 foot summit of Badger Mountain! (See attached articles on the tremendous local support of the public access to Badger Mountain.

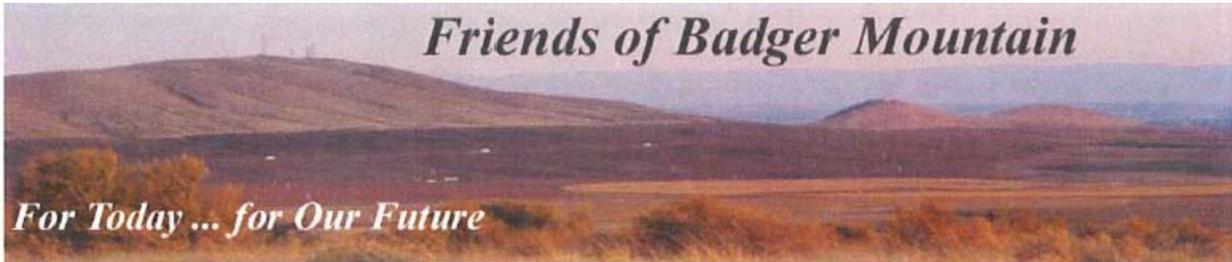
Of what value is a national monument if the public is not allowed access? TRIDEC supports Congressional action that opens public access to Rattlesnake Mountain for the first time in 68

years! Accordingly, we support HR 2719, and urge the Committee to expedite approval of this legislation.

Thank you for allowing me to speak on this very important topic in front of this Congressional Subcommittee.

Attachments to Carl Adrian's testimony:

- 1) *Badger Mountain Trail Usage - Statistics*
- 2) *Hiking Badger Mountain – an article authored by Adam Fyall, Benton County Commissioners Office*



## **Badger Mt. Trail Usage**

**January 20, 2011 - Almost 120,000 hikers took to Badger in 2010!**

**October 16, 2010 - 100,000 hikers counted so far THIS YEAR!**

**June 12, 2010 - Another 101,000 hikers have climbed Badger Mt in the past 13 months!**

**May 10, 2009 - More than 59,000 hikers in the past 12 months!**

If you're a regular hiker on Badger Mt., you know that you're rarely completely alone on the trails (weather and time of day to be considered). Our community is taking advantage of the fresh air, sunshine, and exercise that hikers enjoy on the two main trails. There's also the mental and spiritual exhilaration that happens when we leave civilization behind and walk to a mountaintop, even a local and quite accessible one like Badger.

Not only are the trails rarely empty, but since we started counting on May 10, 2008, over 59,000 people hiked up the two Badger Mt trails in the first year, to 4/26/09. Between that date and June 12, 2010, another 101,000 hikers were counted on both trails. As of October 16, 2010, more than 100,000 hikers were counted, and for all of 2010, the number is almost 120,000. Wow.

You might not have known you were being counted as you took to the trail, but at the base of each trail there is an electronic counter that keeps track each time someone walks by.

# Hiking Badger Mountain

In the five years since it was established, this preserve has become a boon for Tri-Cities hikers

For a case study on what dedicated grass-roots activism combined with a supportive local government partner can deliver for the community, take a hike on Badger Mountain.

## A Preserve Is Born

This wild landscape, where you can find fragile wild onions, native cactus and mariposa lilies growing amidst a variety of bunchgrasses, could just as easily have become back yards like so many of the other hills and ridges in the area.

With the sprawling Tri-Cities beginning to creep up the flanks of the most prominent natural landmark in the area, the Friends of Badger Mountain formed, with a goal to preserve as much of the mountain as possible. The Friends set out on an ambitious regional fundraising campaign and, working through the Trust for Public Land, helped Benton County to secure a 650-acre tract now known as Badger Mountain Centennial Preserve, so named to commemorate the county's one-hundred-year anniversary in 2005.

## A Subtle, Diverse Landscape

A newcomer might look at Badger Mountain and see little more than a big, barren rock thrusting its way up and out of the city, but its character is more nuanced and interesting than that. Rising over 1,000 feet above the surrounding river terrace, the mountain is part of a ridgeline anchored on an east-west axis that gives it dramatically different north and south faces. Microclimates are easily discernible on the relatively small mountain, and hikers will pass through no fewer than four distinct eco-zones on a ninety-minute hike.

The broad south face of Badger Mountain is sun-splashed and windswept. Its thin soils struggle to support sparse grasses and low-growing shrubs across a rocky landscape broken occasionally by deeply-incised ravines that are the refuge for most of the Preserve's

resident coyote population. The south face is also the "quiet side" of the mountain. With its back to the city, Badger looks out over orchards and wheat fields with the muted hues of the Horse Heaven Hills sweeping across the horizon.

As one would expect, the north face of Badger Mountain is cooler, more shaded and generally sheltered

from the prevailing winds. Its terrain is more jumbled, with hills, twisting canyons and small cliffs. With its deeper soils and better moisture retention, the north side of the mountain is more accommodating to thick grasslands and old-growth stands of sagebrush. In contrast to the more agrarian vistas from the south side, this part of the mountain casts its gaze over the bustle of the fourth-largest metropolitan area in Washington, with views of the cities, the Columbia River and the Hanford Reach National Monument in the distance.

The ridgelines and summit area mark abrupt transition zones between the north and south faces. The dual-peaked summit is populated by three large communications tower farms and offers panoramic views in all directions. On clear days, Mounts Hood, Adams, Rainier and Stuart can be seen to the south and west, while the Blue Mountains command the eastern horizon.

As the sun climbs higher and the days grow long and warm, Badger Mountain's plants and animals are rejuvenated. First, the mountain is renewed, as a verdant sea of bunchgrasses sweeps away winter's golden blanket. A parade



**Badger Mountain and bluebell:**  
Photos by John Clement.

of wildflowers follows. First, a rosy veil of phlox visible for several miles cloaks the north face. By May, the balsamroot have stolen the show with their large, yellow sunflowers. In the heat of summer, a more subtle patchwork of color emerges, with the dominant orange globemallow often appearing like small prairie fires in the breeze. Finally, in September, the rabbitbrush blooms in a flush of bright yellow cottonballs, especially in the northwest corner of the preserve.

Badger Mountain's wildlife can be reclusive, but the patient eye will be rewarded. Spring is the domain of the threatened Townsend's ground squirrels on the lower flanks of the mountain; later in the season, jackrabbits and reptiles are more noticeable. Birders who visit the various elevations and environs of the preserve will be treated to a variety of avifauna every bit the equal of the ecology, with numerous songbirds, upland game, sagebrush-dependent species and raptors vying for attention throughout the migration and nesting seasons.

### Hiking the Preserve

Over its first half-decade, the community's embrace and use of Badger Mountain Centennial Preserve has been nothing short of remarkable. Three distinct trails originating from two trailheads provide access onto the mountain and a variety of physical and environmental experiences for the visitor. At those two trailheads, the Friends of Badger Mountain maintain counters that logged more than 100,000 visits in 2010.

The Canyon Trail, dedicated in 2005, carries about 80 percent of the traffic into the preserve from the base to the summit. This hiker-only trail originates in an adjacent city park on the north side of the mountain and climbs 800 vertical feet to the summit in 1.2 miles. The trail snakes upward through a ravine and then out onto the face at about the halfway mark, and offers several viewpoints and rest areas along the way.

The Skyline Trail was developed in two phases beginning in 2006 and provides a 3-mile point-to-point hike over more varied terrain. This trail begins on the west ridge, then takes most of the elevation gain over the first mile of the hike on the north side. It then crosses over for a flatter and distinctly different experience along the south face before reaching the summit area and dropping down the east ridge. The Skyline Trail is multiple-use, available for hikers, cyclists and equestrians. It is particularly popular with the mountain biking community.

The mile-long Sagebrush Trail, completed in 2010, connects the Canyon and Skyline Trails, creating a 3-mile loop. This multi-use trail winds through the old-growth sagebrush in the eastern part of the preserve before dropping onto a bunchgrass prairie below.

### Nurturing the Preserve

The most remarkable thing about the Badger Mountain Preserve isn't the heavy patronage or the fragile landscape that was saved for future generations. Rather, it is the personal investments that those patrons have made and the spirit of cooperation among the agencies and the user groups that has led Badger Mountain to become the premiere hiking destination in the Tri-Cities area.

As with many local governments, Benton County has limited budget and staff resources available for maintenance and improvements within the preserve. This is where the community has stepped in. Corporate partners like REI have provided grants for trail materials, signage and tools. Local organizations such as cycling and equestrian clubs have been key players with trail building and maintenance. Finally, none of this would be possible without the organizational leadership provided by the Friends of Badger Mountain, the park's de facto steward. In partnership with Washington Trails Association and under the guidance of trailmaster Jim Langdon, the Friends of Badger Mountain have planned, engineered and constructed all of the trails on the mountain. WTA's expertise and ability to marshal statewide resources was instrumental to the success of these trail-building efforts, and the original 2005 work party for the Canyon Trail was at that time the largest to date for WTA with over 80 volunteers.



**Large work parties and friendly terrain allowed WTA and Friends of Badger Mountain to construct a trail system on Badger Mountain in fairly short order. Photo by WTA.**

### Badger Mountain's Bright Future

With an excellent team of partners in place and a strong and supportive outdoors constituency, Badger Mountain should enjoy a long and happy life. At least one more main trail is envisioned, and various other amenities and habitat restoration efforts are in the works. If you find yourself in the Tri-Cities and you'd like to stretch your legs for few hours, visit the Badger Mountain Centennial Preserve. You'll experience both the beauty of the open space and a prime example of the kind of asset a community can give itself when it musters its collective will.♦

## Hike It»

### **The Canyon Trail**

**Total Miles:** 2.4 miles  
**Elevation Gain:** 800 feet