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Statement of Congressman Doc Hastings
Ranking Republican, Committee on Natural Resources
Hearing of National Parks, Forests and Public Lands Subcommittee
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 2806
July 30, 2009

Thank you Mr. Chairman. I appreciate this opportunity for the Subcommittee to hear about my bill, H.R. 2806, which allows for continued public access to the North Cascades National Park from the community of Stehekin, Washington.

I am pleased to welcome Senator Linda Evans Parlette, who has long family ties to the Stehekin Community and has been tireless in her efforts to ensure access to the National Park for local residents and tourists. I am also pleased to welcome Chelan County Commissioner Doug England, a long-time resident of the Lake Chelan valley who was elected to county government last fall.

For those who have not had an opportunity to visit Stehekin, the gateway to the North Cascades National Park, this community is located at the western end of Lake Chelan 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 access to some of the most beautiful scenery in the North Cascades.

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 Stephen Mather 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, has written to emphasize that it was Congress' intent to allow for continued road access into the Park.

Failure to fix the Road will keep many visitors from entering the Park and will reduce the number of visitors to the region and to this tourism-dependent community.

My bill would authorize the National Park Service to adjust the wilderness boundary for the sole purpose of rebuilding the closed section of road away from the Stehekin River, provided there is no net loss of wilderness acreage. All federal environmental laws, including the National Environmental Policy Act and the Endangered Species Act, would still have to be complied with for the road to be moved.

I would like to point out that it was only three weeks ago that this Committee approved a bill, H.R. 1061 authored by my friend Mr. Dicks of Washington, which gave away 36 acres of the Olympic National Park without compensation and for the purpose of building a road.

In a July 9th letter to Mr. Bishop, Mr. Wenk and the Park Service endorsed a road and a land giveaway in H.R. 1061, but today the Service opposes a road that will result in no net loss of park or wilderness area for the residents of Stehekin. I look forward to hearing an explanation for this double-standard.

I also understand that the Park Service will oppose this bill, citing "higher priorities." If keeping our nation's promises to local residents affected by federal policies is not a high priority, and if ensuring the public's access to their National Parks and other federal lands is not a high priority, then the Park Service's priorities have become very seriously misplaced.

Again, I'm pleased that the Subcommittee will have this opportunity to hear from Senator Parlette and Commissioner England on the importance of this issue to the local community and all visitors to the North Cascades National Park.