

**STATEMENT
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**BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
JULY 8, 2009**

CONCERNING

**H.R. 1593, TO AMEND THE WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS ACT TO DESIGNATE A
SEGMENT OF ILLABOT CREEK IN SKAGIT COUNTY, WASHINGTON, AS A
COMPONENT OF THE NATIONAL WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS SYSTEM**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide the views of the Department of Agriculture on H.R. 1593.

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, Public Law 90-542 (16 U.S.C. 1271 – 1287, as amended) protects the free-flowing condition, water quality, and outstandingly remarkable natural, cultural, and recreational values of some of our most precious rivers. It also provides an opportunity to build partnerships among landowners, river users, tribal nations, and all levels of government.

This bill amends Sec. 3(a) of the Act to designate a segment of Illabot Creek in Skagit County, Washington, as a component of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. It adds 14.3 miles in two segments: 4.3 miles from the headwaters to the Glacier Peak Wilderness boundary classified as wild, and 10 miles from the Glacier Peak Wilderness boundary to 1000 feet south of the Rockport-Cascade road classified as recreational.

We strongly support the legislation.

The segment to be designated by H.R. 1593 is a tributary of the Skagit River, which was added to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System in 1978. It is located on the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest, approximately 100 miles northeast of Seattle, Washington and flows from the glaciers of the North Cascades into the upper Skagit River, the largest tributary to Puget Sound.

Illabot Creek provides exceptional spawning and rearing habitat for summer and fall Chinook, coho, chum and pink salmon; native steelhead; and, one of the largest populations of bull trout in the Skagit River watershed. Puget Sound Chinook, steelhead and bull trout are listed under the Endangered Species Act. Illabot Creek also supports the highest density of chum and pink salmon in the Skagit River watershed and provides habitat for wintering bald eagles. Eagles

using the Illabot roost are a part of one of the largest concentration of wintering bald eagles in the continental United States.

Mr. Chairman, we recommend the Subcommittee consider designating all of Illabot Creek, from its headwaters to its confluence with the Skagit River (16.3 miles) as recommended in the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest Plan (June 1990). This includes the lower 2 miles, classified as a recreational river, of which approximately 1.4 miles is in the Skagit Wild and Scenic River Corridor. With the designation of Illabot Creek as proposed in H.R. 1593, only 0.6 mile is not included in either Illabot Creek Wild and Scenic River or the existing Skagit Wild and Scenic River corridor. The lower 2 miles includes some of the most important fish spawning habitat and an important foraging and roosting area for wintering bald eagles. Much of this area is in the Skagit River Bald Eagle Natural Area and dedicated to resource protection.

We also have several minor technical corrections to share with the Subcommittee.

This concludes my prepared statement and I would be pleased to answer any questions you may have.