

STATEMENT OF LINDA EVANS PARLETTE, WASHINGTON STATE SENATOR-12TH LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT, BEFORE THE HOUSE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS AND PUBLIC LANDS OF THE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES CONCERNING H.R. 2806, A BILL TO AUTHORIZE THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO ADJUST THE BOUNDARY OF THE STEPHEN MATHER WILDERNESS AND NORTH CASCADES NATIONAL PARK IN ORDER TO ALLOW THE REBUILDING OF A ROAD OUTSIDE OF THE FLOODPLAIN WHILE ENSURING THAT THERE IS NO NET LOSS OF ACREAGE TO THE PARK AND WILDERNESS AND FOR OTHER PURPOSES.

JULY 30, 2009

Mr. Chairman and members of the committee: thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to offer testimony on H.R. 2806, a bill authorizing the Secretary of the Interior to adjust the boundary of the Stephen Mather Wilderness and North Cascades National Park in order to allow the rebuilding of a road outside of the Stehekin River floodplain. This adjustment would ensure that there would be no net loss of acreage to the park and wilderness.

For the record, my name is Linda Evans Parlette. I am the Washington State Senator for the 12th Legislative District in North Central Washington. I represent all of Chelan and Douglas counties, as well as a portion of both Grant and Okanogan counties. My district includes the community of Stehekin, the Lake Chelan Recreation Area and the North Cascade National Park. My legislative district is part of the 4th and 5th Washington State Congressional Districts.

Stehekin is a tiny community located at the West end of Lake Chelan, a glacier fed natural lake—the largest in Washington state, and the 7th largest in the United States. The Stehekin landing can be reached only by boat, float plane, or spending two or three days hiking in.

My grandfather, Ray O’Neal’s first job when he came to Chelan in 1899 was working on the small ferry from Chelan to Stehekin. My family still has the small, original rustic cabin my grandfather built in Stehekin beyond Company Creek; we have long enjoyed our unique Stehekin heritage.

The primitive road to Cottonwood Camp existed prior to the creation of the North Cascades National Park in 1968 and the Washington Parks Wilderness Act of 1988(PL 100-668). The Cottonwood Camp Road was built over 100 years ago in the late 1800s.

I support H.R. 2806 because it would restore access to rustic park facilities and scenic wilderness areas within the North Cascade National Park. It would also provide legislative clarity to the intent of the Washington Parks Wilderness Act of 1988 (PL 100-668); and assure the National Park Service (NPS) is consistent in their road management practices within the wilderness areas in the Olympic, Mount Rainer, and North Cascade National Parks.

I am also supportive of H.R. 2806 because it enables the intent of the original co-sponsors, former U.S. Senator Daniel J. Evans and the late U.S. Senator of the 1988 Washington Parks Wilderness Act that designated wilderness within this magnificent National Park. That is to say, it was their intent to maintain a recreational access corridor in the designated wilderness area within the North Cascades National Park. H.R. 2806 would also allow the National Park Service (NPS) to remain in compliance with the 1995 General Management Plan for the Lake Chelan National Recreation Area, which calls for the road to Cottonwood Camp to remain open.

I would also be supportive of a narrower version of H.R. 2806 which could clearly state that notwithstanding any other provision of law; the National Park Service shall build the road consistent with Alternative D of the Upper Stehekin Valley Road Environmental Assessment of 2006. I will elaborate on this possibility later in this testimony.

Restoring Access to Park Facilities and Wilderness Areas:

In the 1995 General Management Plan for the Lake Chelan Recreation Area, the National Park Service (NPS) "Proposed Action" calls for maintaining vehicular access to Cottonwood Camp. Shortly after adoption of this plan in 1995, the Stehekin River flooded causing a half mile section of the road to washout between Glory and Cottonwood Camp.

1995 Flood

Since the Stehekin River is glacial fed, the main channel meanders from one side of the canyon to the other, and then back again, over time. In 1995, the river was literally flowing right down the road for about a half mile. The NPS could not repair it within the "Non Wilderness Corridor", but knew that, over time, the river would eventually move out of the corridor once again. The NPS made the commitment to have their geomorphologist monitor the river at this location every year and, as soon as it showed signs of moving away from the "Non Wilderness Corridor" re-establish the road again.

The NPS felt this decision was appropriate in that: 1) the NPS committed to rebuild the road within the "Non Wilderness Corridor" when it was physically possible; 2) the NPS only shortened the road by 2.5 miles; 3) this "shortening" only added about two hours to what had been a day hike from Cottonwood Camp or one hour to a trip over Cascade Pass; and 4) vehicular traffic to the Bridge Creek/Flat Creek Trailheads were still viable.

2003 Flood

In 2003 a five hundred year flooding event struck the Stehekin River. This resulted in extensive damage to private property within the community of Stehekin, severe damage to roads and other National Park Service infrastructure within Lake Chelan National Recreation Area, and unprecedented damage to the Upper Stehekin Valley Road within the North Cascades National Park.

The Stehekin community, with the assistance from Chelan County, the Army Corps of Engineers, and the National Parks Service repaired virtually all damage to infrastructure within the Lake Chelan National Recreation Area and the Lower Stehekin Road; however, the Upper Stehekin Valley Road remained impassable above Car Wash Falls.

The Cottonwood Camp Road, also referred to as the Upper Stehekin Valley Road, runs approximately 12.8 Miles from the National Park- National Recreation Area boundary at High Bridge to the Cottonwood Camp. The road remains impassable above Car Wash Falls; which is located approximately 12.9 miles from the Stehekin Landing and just 1.7 miles above High Bridge.

The Washington Parks Wilderness Act of 1988 (PL 100-668), which establishes the Stephen Mather Wilderness Area, provides for a 100 foot wide (50 feet from either side of the centerline of the Road as it existed at the time of the Act) non-wilderness corridor to accommodate this Cottonwood Camp Road. This was done in recognition of the traditional and vital role that this road plays in providing access to exceptional day hikes and fishing opportunities in the Upper Stehekin Valley.

The Wilderness area overlays 93 % of the North Cascades National Park complex. The Park complex is comprised of three park units: the North Cascade National Park, the Ross Lake National Recreation Area

and the Lake Chelan National Recreation Area. The Road falls within the North Cascade National Park unit.

The Act also created non-wilderness enclaves designated around the facilities at Bridge Creek and Cottonwood Camp. These enclaves were designated in recognition of the existing development and the potential for future expanded primitive development in these areas.

To facilitate visitor access to the Upper Valley, the National Park Service developed a shuttle system utilizing the primitive road corridor in the Lake Chelan National Recreation Area and the North Cascade National Park to allow more day hikes, rather than overnight stays, into areas like Horseshoe Basin, Trapper Lake, Flat Creek, Goode Ridge and many others. The shuttle use in the Upper Stehekin Valley (above High Bridge) was approximately 2,500 people per year, based upon National Park Service ridership figures. This ridership included day visitors, people that used the campgrounds along the road, and hikers going and coming from trailheads. It is estimated that an addition 500 to 800 people also utilized private vehicles on this road to access facilities in the park. Without vehicular access, it now takes three to four days to access trailheads in the Upper Stehekin Valley. This, of course, excludes access by those who are not physically capable of such long treks or do not have that much time.

As a result of the 2003 flood, the National Park Service undertook an Environmental Assessment on the Upper Stehekin Valley Road. As required by the National Environmental Policy Act, the NPS looked at all “reasonable alternatives” to mitigate the damage caused to the road. They came up with four alternatives: Alternative A— No Action; Alternative B— Permanently close Stehekin Valley Road Above Car Wash Falls; Alternative C—Reconstruct the Stehekin Valley Road from Car Wash Falls to Glory and, Alternative D—Reroute the Stehekin Valley Road from Car Wash Falls to Bridge Creek and from Glory to Cottonwood Camp.

The National Park Service solicited public comment on all proposed “reasonable alternatives” for the Upper Stehekin Valley road and out of the 251 people who provided input: 37 supported Alternative D, and 178 supported a “new” alternative—a variation of Alternative C of rebuilding the road within the non-wilderness corridor not considered in the EA. **Here is the point: Nearly ninety percent of those commenting wanted the road to Cottonwood Camp to remain open.**

The closure of the Upper Valley Stehekin Road has had a negative effect on the economic viability of the Stehekin Community by limiting access to trailheads and rustic park facilities. It has also created a safety concern for valley residents and visitors.

With an impassible road above Car Wash Falls, vehicular access to multiple trailheads for recreational purposes, as well as fire and safety purposes, is impossible. In addition to trail access being diminished, there are a significant number of visitor facilities at Bridge Creek that used to be accessible by vehicle. These facilities include: a campground, corral, Ranger Patrol Cabin, National Register listed historic public shelter, pit toilets, and an emergency cabin maintained by Chelan County Public Utility District. There is also a six site campground and pit toilets at Cottonwood Camp that use to be accessible by vehicle.

Although Alternative “D” was considered a reasonable alternative and received a great deal of support, it was not selected as the “preferred” alternative due to the interpretation of the Washington Park Wilderness Act of 1988. If adopted, it would have relocated the current road corridor in two locations and utilize what is called the old “Wagon Road”. This is the location that the pioneers created in the first place as it is on higher and safer ground, away from the meandering Stehekin River. This “Old Wagon Road” should enjoy grandfathered status. The “Old Wagon Road” is located from MP 12.7 to MP 15.3 (0.6 miles south of Bridge Creek) and from MP 20.8 to MP 22.8.

Ultimately, the NPS chose Alternative B: permanently close Stehekin Valley Road above Car Wash Falls, as their “preferred” alternative stating, “the constraints of the Washington Parks Wilderness Act (Public Law 100-668) compound the problem of retaining motorized access.”

Clarification of Legislative Intent and Authority:

The Washington Parks Wilderness Act of 1988 (PL 100-668) did not include any additional provisions about maintaining roads in the event of a severe flood or natural catastrophe. Therefore, the NPS stated it believed there is nothing in the law that would indicate Congress intended for the NPS to maintain the Upper Stehekin Road when confronted with substantial damages caused by flood.

I am privileged to know one of the original co-sponsors of the Washington Parks Wilderness Act of 1988 (PL 100-668), former United States Senator and three-term Washington State Governor, Daniel J. Evans. We have spoken often about the “Road to Cottonwood” issue and the intent of this legislation.

When introducing the Washington Parks Wilderness Act of 1988 (PL 100-668), former Senator Daniel J. Evans stated in the Congressional record, **“What the bill would not do is to keep the park visitors shut out of the park. All of the existing transportation and development corridors would be excluded from wilderness designation.”** The legislative history of the Wilderness Act speaks specifically to maintaining the essential recreational corridors (the roads) when designating wilderness in Mount Rainer, Olympic and the North Cascades National Park.

In his July 8th, 2009 written testimony to you, Senator Evans reiterates the importance of these transportation corridors and the need to clarify the intent of the Washington Park Wilderness Act of 1988 (PL 100-668) to keep these corridors open to vehicle transportation as a means to insure access to recreational areas in our wilderness National Parks. He states:

“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 of our National Parks. If we make access substantially more difficult we reduce the number of visitors and ultimately the number of citizens and taxpayers who know enough about these parks to want to protect them.”

I believe direction is needed to provide consistent management standards to the National Park Service for the recreational corridors that provide access to facilities and pristine wilderness areas. H.R 2806 is a reasonable step in this process. This is especially true since the NPS road management policies are inconsistent in their application to wilderness created under the Washington Park Wilderness Act of 1988 (PL 100-668).

Road Management Practices:

As recently as August 8th, 2008, the Olympic National Park General Management Plan was approved through a Record of Decision (ROD) signed by Regional Director Jon Jarvis and subsequently published in the federal register on November 12, 2008. With respect to roads, the ROD states: **“Road access will be maintained to existing front county areas for resource protection, river restoration, and/or maintain vehicular access. Wilderness boundaries may be adjusted along roads to allow continued road access into the park; however, there will be no net loss of wilderness acreage.”**

This Record of Decision implies the National Park Service has already made a commitment to pursue options within wilderness designated under the Washington Parks Wilderness Act of 1988 (PL 100-668) to maintain road corridors with a no net loss of wilderness approach! The current NPS opposition to HR

2806 is inconsistent and arbitrary when compared to the General Management Plan for the Olympic National Park that calls for adjusting wilderness boundaries to allow continued road access within the Park.

Additionally, their choice of wording in the reference to “front country areas” is confusing as, in many cases, these roads, run as a corridor through wilderness before reaching a trailhead facility and/or camping area, such as the Hoh road in the Olympic National Park and the Upper Stehekin Road in the North Cascade National Park.

The Record of Decision for Olympic National Park and its suggested “no net loss of wilderness” approach to the adjustment of wilderness boundaries along roads that provide access to facilities and trailheads creates a philosophical and management conflict with respect to these essential recreational corridors when compared to the current NPS position on the Stehekin Valley Road.

Specifically this conflict is highlighted by the following language found in the Olympic National Park General Management Plan:

“If road relocation away from river meander areas is feasible, wilderness boundary modifications would be sought as necessary, with no net loss of total Olympic National Park wilderness acreage.”

Mr. Chairman, I ask this simple question: how can the National Park Service adopt a Record of Decision supporting boundary adjustments along roads which wash out due to river meandering in the Olympic National Park yet so strongly oppose adoption of the identical approach with respect to the Stehekin Valley Road within the North Cascades National Park?

This inconsistency is amplified when one considers The General Management Plan for Lake Chelan National Recreation Area, produced by the National Park Service in 1995, which reconfirmed the importance of maintaining road access to Cottonwood Camp. After several years of dialogue, debate, and threatened law suits, the General Management Plan (GMP) “Proposed Action” specifically called for maintaining vehicular access to Cottonwood Camp:

“The Stehekin Valley road between the Landing and Harlequin Bridge would remain a two-lane paved road; from Harlequin Bridge to 9-Mile, it would become a single-lane, paved road with pullouts; from 9-Mile to High Bridge, a single-lane, gravel road; and from High Bridge to Cottonwood, a heavy-duty, high-clearance shuttle vehicle road.

Unconstrained private vehicle use would end at High Bridge. Private vehicle use from High Bridge to Bridge Creek would be allowed, but traffic flow would be regulated by season of year and/or hour of day. Public shuttle service would be provided from the Landing to Cottonwood. Only the public shuttle service, hikers, horses, and bicycles would be allowed to use the road from Bridge Creek to Cottonwood. The National Park Service would seek a concessioner to replace the NPS-operated public shuttle service. Frequency of shuttle service would increase over the current rate. Fare structure would provide discounts for frequent and local public shuttle users.”

Given the reasonable, no net loss of wilderness, approach used in H.R. 2806, I simply cannot understand why the National Park Service opposes legislation that would allow it to conform to the lengthy and expensive planning process they undertook in 2006.

The standard for wilderness management within National Parks should be the same. Allowing for different interpretations is a travesty with respect to maintaining access corridors in wilderness areas

within National Parks which invites ridicule of the National Park Service and fosters disrespect for government. After all, citizens are entitled to “equal protection” under the law.

The language in the 2006 Upper Stehekin Valley Road Environmental Impact Statement itself more accurately describes that the National Park Service would seek legislative authority to move the wilderness boundaries consistent with a “no net loss” approach. **Bottom line, the NPS should have clear Congressional direction on how damage to recreational corridors within designated wilderness should be mitigated when caused by natural disaster. This will assure the same standards are applied to all designated wilderness.**

Conclusion:

Congress should clarify the Washington Parks Wilderness Act of 1988 (PL 100-668) to provide the National Park Service with clear direction as to their authority when faced with the need to repair recreational corridors or roads which are altered by natural disasters. I believe HR 2806 is a reasonable approach to providing the clarity needed for the Upper Stehekin Valley Road. I would also be supportive of a policy that would provide clarification for all wilderness dedicated under the Washington Parks Wilderness Act of 1988 (PL 100-668), which calls for a no net loss acreage to the parks and wilderness.

Alternative Approach

I would also be supportive of a narrower version of H.R. 2806, which could clearly state that notwithstanding any other provision of law; the National Park Service shall build the road consistent with Alternative D of the Upper Stehekin Valley Road Environmental Assessment.

You are not being asked to “guess” at the costs or the environmental impacts of adopting H.R. 2806. The work has been done.

If Congress were to direct the National Park Service to implement Alternative “D”, the estimated implementation costs have been laid out in the *Findings of No Significant Impact for the Upper Stehekin Valley Road Car Wash Falls (MP 12.9) to Cottonwood Camp (MP 22.8) North Cascades NPS Complex*:

“This alternative [Alternative D] would take two to three years to implement, and the estimated cost of implementation is \$1,339,075. Under this alternative, the estimated cost of routine, annual road and trail maintenance is \$13,968.”

The NPS hired the Wenatchee National Forest Road Engineering Department to flag the new road route to complete this estimate and provide the exact location of the re-route. The Environmental Assessment was done in a manor to allow direct implementation of Alternative “D”, should Congress provide the legislative authority **without further study**.

There are two advantages in directing the National Park Service to reopen the road to Cottonwood Camp in a manor congruent to Alternative “D.” First of all, the road between Car Wash Falls and Bridge Creek would actually be approximately 0.2 miles shorter than the segment it would replace (2.2 vs. 2.4 miles; 3.2 vs. 3.5 acres), which would result in a **gain** in wilderness.

The second advantage is that by moving this portion of the road back to its original location, it would eliminate the potential for future damage and associated repair costs. It is ironic that the 19th Century Pioneers were truly wiser when they built the historic “Mine-to Market Road” on higher ground to avoid conflicts with floods, a road that also allowed visitors of the Field’s Hotel to access the majestic cirque of

cascading waterfalls at Horseshoe Basin. This road needs to return to being the “gateway to wilderness” in the North Cascades National Park.

Mr. Chairman, at the beginning of my testimony I mentioned my grandfather. I am so lucky to have parents who will celebrate 65 years of marriage on September 3rd. My Dad, an 86 year old World War II Marine, continues to fish in the Stehekin River with my Sons every summer. He no longer can access the fishing holes in the Upper Stehekin Valley as walking that many miles in a day is no longer possible. He hopes to live long enough to see the road reopened.

The word Stehekin means “the way through.” It is time---To Reopen “The Way Through.” Congress should recognize this historic, grandfathered access to the Upper Stehekin Valley just as Senator Evans envisioned, so that we can maintain and even increase the number of citizens and taxpayers who will appreciate and protect this magnificent park.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for your time and this concludes my testimony. I will be pleased to answer questions.

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