

March 6, 2007

The Honorable Nick J. Rahall
Chair, House Natural Resources Committee
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

As conservation and recreation organizations in Washington State, we are writing to express our enthusiastic support for the Wild Sky Wilderness Act of 2007 (S. 520 & H.R. 886). We are hopeful that the Wild Sky will become a reality this year, marking the first federal wilderness designation in Washington State since passage of the Washington Wilderness Act of 1984.

The Wild Sky deserves strong, lasting protection as federally designated wilderness. Wilderness is critical to maintaining the unequaled quality of life we enjoy in Washington and protects our opportunity to leave a natural legacy for future generations. Senator Murray and Congressman Larsen have done an excellent job in crafting legislation that enjoys unprecedented and widespread public support.

The proposal would permanently protect over 106,000 acres, including thousands of acres of old-growth forest. These diverse, intact forests include many trees 6-8 feet in diameter, 200-250 feet tall, and over 300 years old. While most old-growth forest protected in wilderness is at high elevations, much of the Wild Sky proposal is low elevation habitat, providing unprecedented recreational access to these magnificent wildlands as well as habitat with high conservation value for wildlife.

The North Fork Skykomish River and its tributaries serve as the backbone of the proposal and are one of the best remaining strongholds of wild anadromous and freshwater fish in the Puget Sound basin. The proposal would directly protect over 25 miles of salmon and steelhead spawning streams and sustain the health of many more miles of downstream spawning habitat by protecting critical forested watersheds.

The proposal would also protect important habitat for endangered and other sensitive species, including: northern spotted owl, marbled murrelet, bald eagle, mountain goat (including winter range), pine marten, pileated woodpecker, cougar, wolverine, lynx and grizzly bear.

Located within an hour and a half drive from more than 2.5 million Washington residents, the proposal would preserve existing opportunities for primitive recreation in all seasons including hiking, backpacking, camping, fishing, hunting, rafting, kayaking, climbing, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, wildlife watching and horseback riding. Preserving these recreational opportunities supports the local economies of rural towns and communities near the proposal.

We are proud of our Congressional representatives for their tireless efforts to support this gem of our state. We look forward to the permanent protection of Wild Sky to benefit current and future generations of residents and visitors to Washington State.

Thank you for considering this important and historic legislation.

Sincerely,

Michelle Ackermann
Director, Pacific Northwest Region
The Wilderness Society

Steve Anthes
Vice President
Kettle Range Conservation Group

Nalani Askov
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