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STATE OF WASHINGTON

January 30, 2012

The Honorable Patty Murray
United States Senator
448 Russell Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Norm Dicks
United States Representative
2467 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Senator Murray and Representative Dicks,

We write to you today to express our opposition to the Wild Olympics plan that has, divided our communities. This administration highly values the treasures of nature found in the Northwest, but cannot condone a proposal that treats communities, industries and the environment as foes. We understand that not all of the details of the plan have been decided but enough is known to make an informed decision against the idea.

Grays Harbor County Commissioners see the Wild Olympics proposal as one that threatens jobs on the Olympic Peninsula. This is not consistent with Grays Harbor County's mission of Economic Development.

We support environmental conservation, but this proposal would take timberland out of production. Any reduction or further regulation of our timber industry threatens the very livelihoods that people have relied on for generations.

Families in Grays Harbor and other parts of the Peninsula still feel the deep betrayal by the federal government over the reversal of the Grays Harbor Working Agreement and the Shelton Sustained Yield Unit in the aftermath of politically-driven Northern Spotted Owl policy decisions.

National Forest sustained harvest level reductions of up to 90% were supposed to settle the environmental interests in the early 1990s, but we are now asked to negotiate to reach yet another compromise and reduction in harvest levels on the Olympic Peninsula.

The Grays Harbor Commissioners are opposed to any further restrictions that could result in more job losses from sustained management of our federal forestlands.

The Grays Harbor County Commissioners simply cannot support federal acquisition of more lands when there is such neglect of current federal lands.

In 2016, the National Park Service will be 100 years old.

Americans value their national parks - as do Washington State residents, including those of us in Grays Harbor and the rest of the Olympic Peninsula.

Our national parks are currently not in good shape in terms of budgetary support and maintenance.

In its *Made in America* report from (November 2011), the National Park Conservation Association stated "the overall appropriation for the National Park Service (NPS) is nearly \$400 million (or 13%) less than it was 10 years ago. Not only will this mean fewer rangers to greet us, help us plan our visits, and respond to emergencies, but it also means that parks won't be adequately maintained, resources will suffer damage, wildlife will be more vulnerable to poachers, and development threats will increase."

The NPCA goes on to report that "in FY 2011, funding for the National Park Service was reduced by nearly \$140 million, including an \$11.5 million reduction for operations. In tight budget times, it's reasonable for the National Park Service to operate frugally. But thrifty operation isn't enough to keep parks solvent: national parks today receive just 82 cents for every dollar they need to pay for the rangers who are fulfilling the experience of millions of annual visitors and protecting the parks' treasures. And threats are mounting: according to the recently-enacted Budget Control Act of 2011, if Congress is unable to agree on a level of spending and revenue that reduces the budget, programs from defense to national parks will be subject to a budgetary sequester—which means national park budgets could be cut by as much as 9%."

NPCA reports that the NPS discretionary budget in 2002 was \$3 billion (2011 dollars). In 2011, it was \$2.6 billion – a 13% decline. NPCA also reports a NPS operations shortfall of \$500 - \$600 million, a deferred maintenance backlog of \$10.8 billion, and a critical systems deferred maintenance backlog of \$3.7 billion.

NPCA notes that the number of commissioned permanent park rangers in 1980 was 1841, and in 2010 it had dropped to 1417 – a 23% decline. The number of seasonal rangers dropped from 616 in 1980 to 511 in 2010 – a 17% decline.

With our national parks struggling to meet the needs of the public and struggling to maintain the existing lands and facilities, why would we spend money to acquire more land?

The outlook does not look great for the NPS to recover from current backlogs and the decline in levels of service. NPCA reports that "despite a serious bipartisan effort by Congress and two administrations to address chronic underfunding – an effort that has been on hold for at least the last two years – federal policymakers are still not meeting the needs of most national parks. In real dollars, the National Park Service budget is more than \$385 billion below where it was in 2002. In the current budget climate, it may fall further behind."

Closer to home, the Olympic National Park (ONP) does not seem to be faring much better than that national trend.

NCPA reports that since the mid-1980s, ONP's base budget (despite modest growth) had not kept pace with unfunded costs and increasing visitation, and forced the park to trim visitor services despite the park's growing popularity.

In 2004, facing a \$6 million shortfall in operating funds, the park cut seasonal employees from 130 to 25. That reduction in staff meant that, for the first time in the park's history, operating hours at visitor centers were reduced. Public education programs were cut to ensure the remaining centers could be staffed all summer. The visiting public also found shorter campground seasons, some closed entrance stations and backcountry trails. Fewer law enforcement patrols protected visitors and prevented poaching of the park's diverse and endangered animals such as bear, elk, and fish.

Adding to the acreage and complexity of the ONP - at a time when the Park is already unable to keep current with services and maintenance - would only increase the burdens and backlogs to the management and maintenance of the Park.

The Grays Harbor County Commissioners view further restrictions on access and use of federal lands as contrary to stated goals of the NPS and as contrary to the recreational and economic interests of Grays Harbor residents.

The National Park Service includes in its goals in *A Call to Action* (August 2011) to "EXPAND the use of parks as places for healthy outdoor recreation that contributes to people's physical, mental, and social well-being" and to "WELCOME and engage diverse communities through culturally relevant park stories and experiences that are accessible to all."

The Wild Olympics core concepts of Wild & Scenic River designations and Wilderness Area designations are in direct contrast to these Park Service goals of expanding use and increasing accessibility.

The Wild & Scenic and Wilderness Area designations would bring varying levels of restrictions and use and access to the land, either directly or indirectly.

Banning the use of mechanized access, failing to maintain road access, and making parts of the Olympic National Park and Forest less accessible will limit economic activity for our local communities and will limit recreational access, for those with and without mobility limitations.

The Grays Harbor County Commissioners believe The Wild Olympics proposal interferes with the Forest and Fish Law.

The Forest and Fish Law of Washington State was one of the most comprehensive environmental legislation ever adopted. It provides the greatest level of protection for forested streams in the United States. The set of science bases rules and regulations clearly outlines to the forest landowner their obligation to the environment. Those precise directions give the landowner the ability to plan out the forty to sixty years required to raise and harvest a crop of trees. The Wild Olympics Proposal includes taking private properties into the boundary of the park should there be a willing seller. This creates a shadow of uncertainty over a private landowner's property. Randy Johnson, President of Green Crow Corporation, and the Crow family have expressed this concern numerous times. No landowner should have to carry that burden.

While much more could be said about the Wild Olympics proposal, the reasons above are sufficient to recognize that the proposal is not in the best interest of Grays Harbor and the Olympic Peninsula.

Therefore, the Grays Harbor County Commissioners request that you abandon further consideration of legislation related to the Wild Olympics proposal or any variation that involved further restrictions on economic and recreational activities on the Olympic Peninsula.

Instead, the Grays Harbor Commissioners respectfully request that a process begins that first identifies the issues, involves all of the community from the beginning and then works towards needed goals. We support a broader collaborative process that results in a balance of conservation, recreation and harvest management of the natural resources that provide environmental and economic stability in our region.

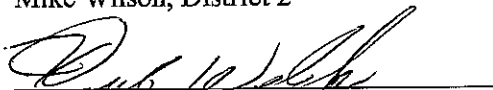
We have specific ideas how this could take place and look forward to your response to this request.

Sincerely,

BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
GRAYS HARBOR COUNTY


Terry L. Willis, Chairman


Mike Wilson, District 2


Herb Welch, District 3

Cc: Washington State Congressional Delegation
Grays Harbor State Legislative Delegation
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