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One Year After Tragedy, New Partnership Launched to Improve Forest Habitat and Strengthen Darrington's Economic Future

Murray, DelBene, Inslee join conservation organizations and local leaders to grow economic vitality of area where SR 530 slide occurred

(Washington, D.C.) – Today, U.S. Senator Patty Murray, Congresswoman Suzan DelBene, Governor Jay Inslee, and leaders from major conservation organizations, local STEM education programs and the community of Darrington announced the formation of a new partnership called the Darrington Collaborative. The goal of the group is to bring together a variety of interests, including those of the local timber industry and conservation community, in order to increase ecologically sustainable timber harvests near Darrington and create jobs, while improving the health of forests and watersheds in the area.



[Senator Murray in Darrington to announce the collaborative](#)

Today's announcement comes roughly one year after a slide killed 43 people, destroyed homes, damaged public infrastructure including a main highway, and blocked the Stillaguamish River, causing significant environmental and economic damage. At a meeting at the Darrington Community Center today, members of the newly-formed partnership invited the public to attend upcoming meetings and field trips, and released their official Governance document for the collaborative (included below).

The following individuals and organizations form the Darrington Collaborative steering committee:

- Darrington Mayor Dan Rankin
- Paul Wagner, Darrington Area Resources Association & Washington State Society of American Foresters
- Steve Skaglund, Three Rivers Contract Logging
- Bob Boyd, member, Darrington Area Resources Association
- Washington Wild
- The Wilderness Society
- Thomas O'Keefe, PhD, American Whitewater
- The Pew Charitable Trusts
- Oak Rankin, Director, Glacier Peak Institute -WSU STEM coordinator
- Mike Town, Tesla STEM High School Environmental Sciences Educator

The Darrington Collaborative grew out of the trust and goodwill created between the conservation community and the community of Darrington in the aftermath of the tragic Oso landslide in March of 2014, after Senator Murray initiated a dialogue between the local community and conservation organizations, with the active support and encouragement of Governor Inslee and Congresswoman DelBene. The conservation organizations worked with Darrington leadership to model the Darrington Collaborative after similar partnerships elsewhere in Washington and across the country.

“As we continue to bring diverse groups and stakeholders together to build on the resiliency of Darrington and Oso, I am proud to join Mayor Rankin, Congresswoman DelBene and Governor Inslee in announcing the Darrington Collaborative,” **said Senator Patty Murray.** “By engaging in ecologically sound timber harvest under the Northwest Forest Plan through the collaborative, we improve local watersheds and enhance clean water and habitat while supporting local jobs.”

“This community and the people who live here will always have a special place in my heart after the kindness that was shown to their neighbors every day after the heartbreaking landslide in Oso last year. But out of something so tragic came many different conversations with people from all walks of life, focused on what can be done to support this incredible

community,” **Congresswoman Suzan DelBene (WA-01)** said. “The Darrington Collaborative brings together a remarkable partnership between the environmental, forestry, and local communities with the goal of increasing ecologically beneficial timber harvesting to improve the health and sustainability of our forest.”

“It is no surprise to me that this community, recognized for its grit and uncommon optimism, has found a way to bring together groups with a common interest in finding a way forward. We know that sound and sustainable practices can bring both ecological benefits to forests and much-needed economic activity to communities. This collaborative effort will ensure the needs and interests of loggers, community leaders, environmentalists, students and others are incorporated into a meaningful and productive plan for years to come,” **said Governor Jay Inslee.**

“We have brought together a partnership of folks from diverse backgrounds to assist the USFS Darrington Ranger District with forestry and restoration projects,” **said Darrington Mayor Dan Rankin.** “Through the expertise of these individuals and community input, we hope to develop projects to improve ecological diversity and forest health, while creating sustainable jobs in the forest. We thank Governor Inslee, Senator Murray, Representative Suzan DelBene for recognizing the challenges the USFS and rural communities face today, and their commitment to the health and welfare of our natural environment and their support of this initiative.”

“The Darrington Collaborative is well positioned for success, with strong leadership from the local community, active engagement of diverse stakeholders, and a science-based approach toward forest restoration and adaptive management that is fully consistent with the Northwest Forest Plan,” **said Mike Anderson of The Wilderness Society.** “We have seen community-based collaboration produce remarkable environmental and social benefits elsewhere in Washington and our region.”

“Thanks to a sustained dialogue with Darrington leaders, Senator Murray, Congresswoman DelBene and the Governor’s office, this collaborative allows us to be part of a unique opportunity to engage in a scientifically-grounded restoration effort that will have stewardship, educational and local economic benefits,” **said Tom Uniack, Conservation Director for Washington Wild.** “We invite the public to learn more by visiting the collaborative’s new website at: www.DarringtonCollaborative.org.”

“The new partnership will provide a mechanism for stewardship contracts that will enable revenue from timber harvest to be directly invested in projects that benefit water quality and river health,” **said Thomas O’Keefe, PhD, an aquatic ecologist and the Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director for American Whitewater.** “Many important projects await funding within the Sauk and Stillaguamish watersheds and through this program we will be able to tackle known water quality issues efficiently and proactively.”

“This partnership is a win-win opportunity for our environment, the community of Darrington, and the future of our forests,” **said Jon Owen, a public lands officer at the Pew Charitable Trusts.** “It brings together diverse groups to restore critical salmon and wildlife habitat and improve water quality, while helping the local timber industry and Darrington’s youth in order to create a stronger community.”

“The collaborative is the ideal opportunity for Darrington’s youth to learn and contribute to the ecological and economic regeneration of their community through scientific monitoring and evaluating the effects of vegetation management and aquatic restoration,” **said Oak Rankin, Glacier Peak Institute-WSU STEM coordinator.** “Under the guidance of WSU, and with help from Mike Town & the Tesla STEM High School, the collaborative also gives our community the opportunity to design a STEM curriculum which can be replicated in other rural areas.”

Darrington Collaborative purpose and goals:

“The Darrington Collaborative will bring together stakeholders from the community of Darrington, WA, the environmental community, members of the local Darrington timber industry, Darrington STEM youth education programs and representatives from federal, state and local government around shared goals of increasing ecologically sustainable timber harvest under the Northwest Forest Plan on the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest near Darrington while improving the ecological functioning of our forests and watersheds. The collaborative will work together and with federal officials to address issues that stand in the way of achieving the stated goals. Ultimately, the purpose is to show we can simultaneously create a more ecologically resilient forest, provide for increased, sustainable timber harvests on the Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest near Darrington, and provide economic benefits to the community of Darrington and educational opportunities for Darrington’s youth through the STEM program.”