

September 12, 2014

The Honorable Mary Landrieu, Chair  
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Doc Hastings, Chair  
House Natural Resources Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski, Ranking Member  
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Peter DeFazio, Ranking Member  
House Natural Resources Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Committee Chairs and Ranking Members:

As business leaders of companies in Washington State we are writing in support of protecting our unique heritage of public lands in the Evergreen State. Recently, research has confirmed what business owners in Washington have known for some time, that quality of life issues, like access to wild lands and waters or historic destinations, is a key component to attracting top talent and corresponding economic growth. We view these protected public lands as recreational and economic assets to our employees, Washington residents and visitors from around the world and therefore support efforts to further protect these resources.

We are aware that there are several public lands bills pending final approval in Congress that would preserve important natural resources and make a significant contribution to local economies by sustaining or improving the quality of life for Washington residents.

For example, the **Manhattan Project National Historical Park Act** (H.R. 1208/S.507) offers the National Park Service the opportunity to share the complex story of the Manhattan Project. The park would interpret the national contributions made by Tri-Cities residents, how the project helped empower women into the workplace and the resulting impacts of atomic power and nuclear energy. The park would address the fact that only a small percentage of our national parks are currently dedicated to interpreting science and technology.

The **Alpine Lakes Wilderness Additions and Pratt and Middle Fork Snoqualmie Rivers Protection Act** (H.R. 361/S.112) is a bi-partisan bill with local support from more than 300 elected officials, sportsmen, local businesses and other stakeholders. This legislation would protect clean water, native trout, world-class outdoor recreation and the high quality of life that give us a competitive edge over other regions in attracting and retaining the talented people our companies require.

Legislation to designate **Illabot Creek** as a **Wild and Scenic River** (H.R.829/S.383) has garnered support from local elected officials, businesses, sportsmen, and adjacent land owners. Wild & Scenic designation would protect stream flows and important spawning habitat for iconic Northwest salmon species in this creek which flows into the Skagit Wild & Scenic River – a premier recreational destination and highly important watershed for salmon recovery.

The **Mountains to Sound Greenway National Heritage Area Act** (H.R.1785/S.2602) is bipartisan legislation supported by 2,000 local stakeholders and individuals that would unite varied interest groups and consummate twenty years of conservation efforts and coordination to promote tourism, protect our quality of life, conserve our natural resources and help the farming, forestry and outdoor recreation industries thrive on the doorstep of the 15th largest metropolitan area in the nation.

Our people are our key asset, and even in the current difficult economic environment, many of our employees can find work wherever they wish. But they choose to live and work here largely because of the high quality of living, outdoor recreation and spectacular views offered by our public lands legacy here in the Evergreen State.

The preeminent business strategists of our times- Michael Porter of Harvard and Tom Peters have been stressing the need for this business mindset for many years now. “We have entered the Age of Talent. People (their creativity, their intellectual capital, their entrepreneurial drive) is all there is. But to attract and retain Awesome Talent, an organization must offer up an Awesome Place to Work.” (Peters) Whether it is the snow-capped peaks of the Cascades mountains, the deep waters of the Puget Sound or the role Hanford played in American history, Washington’s public lands are an important asset for businesses and people alike.

There is new statistical evidence of these competitive advantages. Headwaters Economics’ *West is Best-How Public Lands in the West Create a Competitive Economic Advantage*, published in November 2012, documents how the West’s popular national parks, monuments, wilderness areas and other protected public lands have given its growing high-tech and services industries competitive advantages. As a result, these economies have outperformed the rest of the U.S. economy in key measures of growth—employment, population, and personal income—during the last four decades. Closer to home, in the past two decades, Washington State’s population grew 56 percent faster than the nation as a whole, adding nearly 2 million people, creating jobs and growing our economy.

We urge you to work with the Washington Congressional delegation to add to the continuing legacy of bipartisan support for public lands in Washington State. Those of us who live and work here and our families for years to come will thank you for such a wise investment in the land and people of Washington.

Sincerely,

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