March 12, 2018

The Honorable Patty Murray
United States Senate
154 Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

RE: Local Support for Inventoried Roadless Area Protections in Washington State

Dear Senator Murray:

We are writing to express our strong support for protecting our national forest roadless areas -- incredible landscapes like South Quinault Ridge, Dark Divide, Abercrombie Hooknose, Liberty Bell (Methow Headwaters), Upper Tucannon and Boulder River here in Washington State. Over the last year local and national threats have emerged that threaten existing protections for roadless areas.

In Washington State, a diverse and strong coalition of conservation, recreation, wildlife, faith-based and local economic and political leaders have recognized the values of the nearly two million acres of national forest roadless areas statewide. These unroaded, unlogged, old-growth, high-functioning ecosystems account for just 22% of the more than 9 million acres of national forests within Washington State. Many roadless areas are adjacent to large unroaded sections of Mount Rainier, Olympic and North Cascades National Parks providing large areas of contiguous wildlife habitat and ecological integrity. Additionally, many feel an obligation to protect these wild places as evidence of God’s creation.

Between 1999 and 2001, the National Forest Roadless Area Conservation Rule (Roadless Rule) was established as part of one of the largest rulemakings in the history of the federal government. The Forest Service held more than 600 public meetings nationwide, including 28 throughout Washington State. More than 1.6 million Americans submitted comments, including more than 80,000 comments from Washington State citizens during the draft rule comment period. More than 95% of comments submitted were in support of protecting roadless areas. According to a March 2000 opinion poll, more than 72% of all Washington residents supported the complete protection of these last remaining wild areas of their national forests.

The Roadless Rule outlined common sense balanced protections that are appropriate for managing and retaining Washington’s roadless forests. At its heart, it is focused on prohibiting new road construction in those areas of our national forests that are currently unroaded. The Rule does not close existing roads or trails or change current access for hikers, cyclists, paddlers, climbers, campers and other recreational users. The policy also has common sense provisions allowing for emergency road building to protect public health and safety during natural disasters.

The Rule preserved critical habitat for more than 1,500 species of fish and wildlife, including many threatened and endangered species while also safeguarding sources of clean and safe drinking water for millions of Americans. In Washington, roadless areas such as the Quilcene, Glacier Peak Adjacent, Boulder River Adjacent, Mt. Baker West, McDonald and Alpine Lakes

The Honorable Patty Murray
Adjacent all protect the headwaters and source of municipal drinking water supplies for the local communities that include, but are not limited to, Port Townsend, Sequim, Bellingham, Everett and Leavenworth.

The Roadless Rule also maintains current public access and recreational opportunities, including hiking, camping, horseback riding, climbing, hunting and fishing. Roadless areas provide world class recreation opportunities as well as family accessible outings that fuel local economies. According to the Outdoor Industry Association, 72% of Washingtonians participate in outdoor recreation each year, generating $26.2 billion in consumer spending and more than 200,000 jobs.¹

Many of our organizations spent years defending the Roadless Rule from an administrative effort to weaken and eliminate roadless protections throughout the West in the 2000’s. Through grassroots advocacy and citizen mobilization, that effort was met with the same broad and deep support for these pristine landscapes as was evident in the original rulemaking. For nearly two decades the Roadless Rule has protected the conservation, recreation and wildlife values that play such a large role in the quality of life we all enjoy here in the Pacific Northwest.

However, over the last year we have become increasingly concerned about legislative provisions and administrative proposals that would violate or threaten roadless forests.

Nationally, the current Senate appropriations bill for fiscal year 2018 includes a rider that would exempt the Tongass and Chugach National Forest in Alaska from the Roadless Rule. Both the nature of this rider and the direct attack on roadless forests is of great concern. Furthermore, the House of Representatives on November 1, 2017 passed the “Resilient Federal Forests Act,” which would allow Forest Service logging projects within inventoried roadless areas, thus undermining the Roadless Rule.

Locally, at least two administrative proposals on the Mt. Baker Snoqualmie National Forest here in Washington State have emerged threatening inventoried roadless areas. First, in the fall of 2017, the Forest Service approved a proposed expansion of the Swen Larsen olivine quarry into the Mt. Baker West Inventoried Roadless Area despite significant opposition during both comment periods and a formal objection. The proposal would obliterate the old growth forests and other values leaving only bare rock. Second, in December, the Forest Service proposed constructing a new road through the Mt. Baker North Inventoried Roadless Area as part of a redevelopment of the Excelsior Mine near Mt. Baker. There is concern locally about additional proposals that would violate roadless areas protected by the Roadless Rule.

Please vote against any legislative efforts to weaken or eliminate roadless forest protection under the Roadless Rule, including the Alaska-based Tongass National Forest and roadless area riders attached to the FY 2018 Interior Appropriations bill. Additionally, please speak out against any administrative efforts to weaken or eliminate roadless area protections. Current and future generations of Washingtonians will thank you.

Sincerely,

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Washington Wild

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Vancouver Wildlife League

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Washington State Director  
The Wilderness Society

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Pacific Northwest Conference of The United Church of Christ

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Co-Founder/Owner  
Counterbalance Brewing Company
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<tr>
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<th>Role</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rod Dembowski</td>
<td>Councilmember</td>
<td>Metropolitan King County Council – District 1</td>
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<td>Kelsey, Ben, Liz &amp; Craig Curran</td>
<td>Owners</td>
<td>Watershed Pub &amp; Kitchen</td>
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<td>Terry Frost</td>
<td>President</td>
<td>Lower Columbia Flyfishers</td>
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<td>Dave Werntz</td>
<td>Science &amp; Conservation Director</td>
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<td>Rob Smith</td>
<td>Northwest Regional Director</td>
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<td>Ron Force</td>
<td>President</td>
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<td>Brian de Place</td>
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<td>Methow Valley Citizens Council</td>
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<td>Northwest Outward Bound School</td>
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<td>Jon Hoekstra</td>
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<td>Mountains to Sound Greenway Trust</td>
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<td>Joseph Bogaard</td>
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<td>David Kliegman</td>
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<td>Sam Merrill</td>
<td>Conservation Committee Chair</td>
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<td>Brian Stan</td>
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<td>Co-Founders</td>
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<td>Haley Keller</td>
<td>Co-Owner, Finance &amp; Retail Operations</td>
<td>Peddler Brewing Company (Seattle)</td>
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*Affiliations for identifications purposes only