

Testimony by U.S. Senator Patty Murray on S. 1610, the Wild Olympics Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Act of 2015

April 21, 2016

Thank you, Chairman Barrasso. I want to thank you and Ranking Member Wyden for including the Wild Olympics Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Act as part of today's hearing, as well as Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Cantwell.

The natural treasures of the Olympic Peninsula in my home state of Washington are a national crown jewel. The Olympic National Forest and the Olympic National Park are an important part of our nation's heritage, and provide world class recreation for today's public and for future generations.

For three successive Congresses I have introduced legislation to extend wilderness protections to key forested areas of the Olympic National Forest and designate the first wild and scenic rivers on the Olympic Peninsula. I am so pleased that this bill is receiving a hearing today in front of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining.

I wish to acknowledge my colleague and partner on this bill, Congressman Derek Kilmer, as well as former Congressman Norm Dicks. Throughout this process, both Congressman Kilmer and former Congressman Dicks have been champions of this effort, and have been tireless partners in the effort to communicate with local communities and stakeholders in order to develop the proposal and understand local priorities.

The Wild Olympics legislation reflects years of consensus-building to protect remarkable areas of the Olympic National Park and Olympic National Forest. The designation of wild and scenic rivers helps protect clean drinking water for thousands of residents in downstream communities, while simultaneously preserving critical salmon and steelhead habitat and the significant federal investments already made to help restore salmon runs. Healthy and clean rivers and streams on the Olympic Peninsula are important to Washington state's robust shellfish industry and to the recovery and restoration of Puget Sound, our nation's largest estuary. The 126,554 acres of wilderness included in the legislation permanently protects existing federal land, primarily high-quality habitat, including lower elevation habitat. Designation as wilderness would protect landscapes and habitats essential to many native plants and animals.

Like many Washington state wilderness proposals, the Wild Olympics legislation came together at the local level, the product of community members rallying around a vision of protecting the world-class resources of the Olympic Peninsula, famous for their outdoor recreation opportunities and habitat and wildlife. After learning about the proposal, Congressman Dicks and

I and our staffs met with an extensive list of stakeholders, including tribes, conservation groups, timber interests, business leaders, shellfish growers, farmers, local elected officials, recreation groups including hunters and anglers, federal and state land managers, and other members of the public. We worked to develop legislation that will protect the Olympic Peninsula's ancient forests, free-flowing rivers, and stunning scenery without impacting timber jobs.

Since he came to Congress, Congressman Kilmer has taken a leadership role on this proposal in the House and continued the tradition of robust outreach and consultation with the community. My colleagues and I have worked hard to address issues and concerns that have been brought to us. Together we have discussed issues such as timber harvest, the state of the local economy, and conservation of our public lands. I am grateful to everyone who reached out to us and worked with us and, because of our hard work, the bill has garnered broad support.

The Wild Olympics Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Act will benefit the local environment and the economy of the Olympic Peninsula, which is why the list of supporters continues to grow. Today, more than 12,000 of my constituents support the legislation. Over 550 local businesses, farms, conservation and recreation groups, local elected officials, and religious leaders have endorsed the legislation. Companies who have located to the Olympic Peninsula because of the region's quality of life and vicinity to wild places have joined businesses who depend upon the clean water and recreation opportunities of the region in support.

The Wild Olympics will create new economic opportunities for the region. This proposal was carefully designed to grow the local and state outdoor recreation industry, which is a vital economic driver in Washington state, and is why groups like the Outdoor Industry Alliance and The Conservation Alliance support these designations. It will help attract new residents, entrepreneurs and investments that create local jobs in the region.

I appreciate that Deputy Chief Casamassa from the Forest Service is here today to testify. I look forward to working with him on this legislation.

Conserving and preserving our most special places reflects the values I grew up with in Washington state and I want to leave the same kind of legacy for my grandchildren and for future generations. And this legislation will ensure that we protect this unique landscape while investing in the local economy of the Olympic Peninsula. I appreciate your time today and I look forward to working with you and the Committee to move forward on this legislation.