

PATTY MURRAY'S WASHINGTON VIEW

U.S. Senator Patty Murray's Weekly Report to the People of Washington – July 9, 2004

Wild Sky Update

The Wild Sky Wilderness is a proposed area of 106,000 acres in the Snoqualmie National Forest. It's north of Index, only 90 minutes from 2.5 million Washington residents. Designating this national treasure a protected area would allow it to be kept pristine forever, and would allow future generations to hike, fish, cycle, climb, and swim its majestic places forever.

Preservation of these lands would serve several key functions. It would:

- **Protect wildlife and promote clean water** - by preserving the landscapes that host many native plants and animals. The wilderness will help protect wolves, mountain goats, black and grizzly bears, deer, and healthy runs of salmon, steelhead, and trout.
- **Enhance and protect recreational opportunities for the region** - It protects the area for today's users and seeks to open up new areas for climbers, hikers, hunters, and anglers. It directs the Forest Service to work with the public to develop new trails -- in and around -- the wilderness to expand public access to these remarkable landscapes.
- **Reflect the diverse landscapes of the Puget Sound region** - Only 6.6 percent of all Washington state wilderness areas are under 3,000 feet. As a result, current wilderness areas don't reflect the entire array of ecological systems. The Wild Sky Wilderness is made up of about 30% low-land areas -- including low-land forests and salmon-bearing streams.
- **Contribute to the local economy** - People looking for easy and quick access to nature will see the Wild Sky listed in maps and hiking books as a special destination. Every climber, hiker, hunter, and angler setting out to the Wild Sky Wilderness will be stopping at hotels, campgrounds, restaurants, and stores in the gateway communities in the greater Skykomish region.

In 2002, I authored a bill to allow protection of these areas, which residents have cherished for millennia. My bill passed both the full Senate and a House committee. Unfortunately, the bill was never brought up for a vote on the House floor. So, in February 2003, I reintroduced my bill, S. 391, and Rep. Rick Larsen (D-WA) introduced companion legislation in the House of Representatives, H.R. 822. In November, the Senate passed the Wild Sky Wilderness bill (S.391) for the second time in two years. That bill now awaits action in the House.

Yet it has been difficult to convince Republican members of the House the Resources Committee to recognize the importance of this legislation – and the areas of our state that it seeks to protect. Recently, we have been in joint House-Senate negotiations, which have finally led Committee Chairman, Rep. Richard Pombo (R-CA) to schedule a hearing to discuss the bill.

While I'm glad we're finally moving forward, the timing of this hearing concerns me. The hearing is scheduled for July 22, one day before Congress recesses for more than a month. When we return in September, the calendar promises to be very full, so it may not be possible to act on this proposal before the end of this session. If it is not acted upon, it would have to be reintroduced in the House and Senate next year. This would be a serious setback for these natural treasures, and for all Washingtonians.

I hope the House leadership sees its way clear to pass legislation that will create the Wild Sky Wilderness this year. It's simply too important to wait.

This is one of my top priorities. I will continue to pursue this legislation in the Senate, and will continue to call upon my colleagues in the House to do the right thing.

Read more about my proposal, and see photos of Wild Sky:

<http://murray.senate.gov/wilderness>

Working for Rural Telecom

On Wednesday, I participated in a video conference and ribbon cutting with the West End Technology Center in Forks. I delivered remarks, after which I joined the Forks attendees in a simultaneous "virtual" ribbon cutting. The event was attended in Forks by community leaders, citizens, and some of the students and business people who will benefit most from the facility.

I supported an \$89,000 federal Economic Development Initiative Grant that allowed Forks to purchase the facility, remodel it, and also to document the process used to pursue telecom infrastructure improvements. The West End Tech Center connects rural communities to the World Wide Web, providing opportunities for better education and economic growth. With this innovative technology, small business owners have access to potential customers worldwide, and students have access to computer skills training and job seeking opportunities.

I've been a strong advocate for improved access to telecommunications and high-speed Internet in rural areas of Washington state, because I know that a gap in access is a gap in opportunity. I've worked in Washington state and in Washington, D.C., to increase access for small and rural communities. In 1999, I assembled a Statewide Rural Telecommunications Working Group, which is comprised of 20 community and business leaders. This group helps identify and create possible solutions to small and rural communities' telecommunications needs. I've also organized conferences throughout the state to help communities such as Wenatchee, Bremerton, Colville, and Walla Walla to the business world. These conferences bring together economic development officials and high-tech providers to help improve high-speed access.

In the U.S. Senate, I wrote and introduced the Community Telecommunications Planning Act, which provides \$60 million annually in technology planning grants to rural and underserved areas. I co-sponsored the Broadband Internet Access Act, which uses tax credits to encourage companies to build broadband in rural areas. I also co-sponsored the Broadband Expensing Act, which encourages companies to invest in broadband by allowing them to expense the cost of their investments in broadband infrastructure.

We live in a state that's home to some of the best and brightest in the world when it comes to innovative technology. I believe we can – and should – make that technology available to communities throughout Washington. I'm proud to be a partner in that effort.

Get more about this event and read my remarks:

<http://murray.senate.gov/news.cfm?id=223708>

A Note To My Readers

Because federal election laws prohibit doing mass mailings, including emails, within 60 days of a primary for federal office through the election, next week's *Washington View* will be the last before the November elections. So look for it in your mailbox next week – and then again in November!

- Patty

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