



February 14, 2017

King County Council
Transportation, Economy and Environment Committee
516 Third Avenue, Room 1200
Seattle, WA 98104

RE: Proposed Motion 2017-0050.1

Dear Members of the Transportation, Economy and Environment Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to speak today on the importance of federal public lands to King County, the state of Washington, and to our entire nation.

I work as the Public Lands Guardian for WildEarth Guardians, a non-profit conservation organization dedicated to maintaining and restoring the health of wild places, wild rivers and wildlife across the West. WildEarth Guardians has 93 members in King County, and more than 10,000 nationwide.

There are at least four reasons why the King County Council should adopt or pass Proposed Motion 2017-0050.1. Those are:

- 1) Public lands are an essential part of our national heritage;
- 2) Public lands are vital to the area economy;
- 3) Washington cannot afford to own and maintain the public lands currently managed by the US government;
- 4) It is contrary to the public's will to give these lands to individual states.

I will discuss the first two points and Paul Kundtz of the Trust for Public Lands will address the other two.

Today, there are more than 600 million acres of U.S. public lands, not including lands managed by the Department of Defense. This is slightly more than one-fourth of the land base in the U.S. (approximately 2,270,000,000 acres overall). There are more than 12,000,000 acres of U.S. public land in Washington, about 28 percent of the state's land base. In King County, there are more than 360,000 acres of U.S. public lands, most of it Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest land. This is approximately one-fourth of the county land area.

The writer and historian Wallace Stegner said that national parks were "the best idea we ever had. Absolutely American, absolutely democratic, they reflect us at our best rather than our worst." This is true of all of America's public lands; not only the parks, but also national forests, wildlife refuges and public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

Our public lands are "absolutely American and democratic" in that every one of us in this country, regardless of our economic situation, whether we live in the city or country, whether we vote blue or red, are equal owners of a significant share of this country's most prized lands.

Because we are all equal owners, we all enjoy equal access to them and are given an equal say in how they're managed. We also all equally share in the responsibility to maintain and preserve those lands, so that future generations can enjoy them the same ways we have.

It is this egalitarian sharing of both opportunity and responsibility that, as Stegner said, "reflects our nation at its best."

Historically, there has been strong support for public lands across the political spectrum. Teddy Roosevelt, a Republican at least during his time as President, was a fierce advocate for public lands and probably our best-known conservation President. After becoming president in 1901, Roosevelt used his authority to establish 150 national forests, 51 federal bird reserves, four national game preserves, five national parks and 18 national monuments. Altogether, he protected more than 230 million acres of public land.

While I've talked about shared opportunity and responsibility of public lands, it is shared experiences, more than anything else, that have made public lands such an important part of our national heritage.

Whether it's fishing with a friend on the Middle Fork of the Snoqualmie for a couple hours after work on a summer weeknight, taking a day to hike with family to forage for mushrooms on a Saturday in autumn, or even a weeklong vacation to the Methow Valley in eastern Washington, a large number of our outdoor experiences take place on public lands. Those experiences begin with young kids, going out on their first hike or first family camping trip, and last well through retirement years.

It is estimated that the average Washingtonian spends 56 days each year doing some kind of outdoor recreation. A visit to a trailhead up near Snoqualmie Pass almost any weekend out of the year will confirm King County residents' love for their shared natural spaces.

Our local culture and how we are seen by the rest of the world views are strongly shaped by public lands. If an outsider's first image of the region is the Space Needle, the second image is probably Mt. Rainier. The towering evergreen trees of the Cascades and the Olympics aren't far behind as a mental image of our region. I don't know how many times I've been on an airplane flying into or out of SeaTac Airport and overheard visitors talking about how green and beautiful our region is.

Not only do our public lands help define our region and offer us places to relax and recreate, they are also an important contributor to our strong economy.

Earth Economics, a non-profit ecosystem economics consulting group from Tacoma, has estimated that annual expenditures related to outdoor recreation on federal public lands in King County alone is \$44,000,000 annually, and that outdoor recreation supports more than 27,000 jobs in the county. These jobs cross many sectors, including sporting goods retailers, other retailers such as grocery stores and gas stations, hotels and motels, and restaurants.

A significant share of those economic impacts result from out-of-state visitors to federal public lands. State-wide, there are 9,000,000 annual participant-days from out-of-state visitors on public lands. Each participant day generates more than \$67.00, meaning that out-of-state visitors spend more than \$621,000,000 annually on outdoor recreation on federal public lands in Washington. While many of the out-of-state visitors drive into Washington from neighboring states, a substantial percentage of out-of-state visitors arrive in Washington via Sea-Tac Airport and spend at least one night at a hotel in King County and patronize our restaurants.

Additional statistics on out-of-state visitors and outdoor recreation confirm the importance of federal public lands:

- Out-of-state visitors generate approximately \$80,000,000 million in Washington taxes annually;
- 23 percent of outdoor recreation jobs in the state are attributed to out-of-state visits;
- Two-thirds of out-of-state visitor expenditures are for hotels and motels, restaurants and gasoline.

The U.S Forest Service offers another set of statistics showing the contribution of public lands to the region's economy. While statistics for the Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest (MBSNF) are not available at the county level, the numbers for the Forest as a whole illustrate that it has significant impacts on western Washington's economy.

The MBSNF is responsible for about \$66,000,000 in annual labor income, of which almost \$16,000,000 results from out-of-state visitors recreating on the Forest. Resource extraction (timber, mining, grazing) on the MBSNF contributes another \$14,000,000 in labor income, and managing and maintaining the Forest (road and trail maintenance, ecological services, etc., by Forest Service personnel and private contractors) contributes another \$16,000,000. Overall, activities on the MBSNF contribute 1400 jobs in local communities, with about 400 of those jobs resulting from recreation by out-of-state visitors.

Public lands contribute indirectly to the regional economy as well, as they provide an important competitive advantage in recruiting and retaining talented employees and creating new jobs.

A 2012 Headwaters Economics Institute study found that protected public lands, such as the Wild Sky and Alpine Lakes Wilderness Areas in King County and Mt. Rainier to the south in Pierce County, are key to attracting companies, entrepreneurs and workers, especially in the high-tech and professional service industries. The study concluded that this competitive advantage was a major reason why the economy of the western U.S. has outperformed the overall U.S. economy in employment, population, and personal income over the last four decades as the United States has transformed from a products-based to a services economy.

The study included a quote from a vice president at a leading recruitment firm for this region's technology industry. While noting that career amenities have become increasingly important to candidates' career decisions, he noted that not simply what the job was, but where the job was factored heavily into a candidate's decisions. Outdoor recreation was commonly discussed with candidates, he said, because "the outdoors is part of the culture here."

In 2104, 45 local and state business executives sent a letter to Washington's Congressional delegation emphasizing that public lands provide an important competitive advantage for Washington businesses. The letter noted 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."

Given King County residents' love for public lands, as well as the significant direct and indirect contributions that public lands have on King County's economy, I ask that the Council pass Proposed Motion 2017.0050.1 expressing the County's support for the continued U.S. ownership of public lands.

Sincerely,

Chris Krupp, Public Lands Guardian
WildEarth Guardians