

Wild Olympics, Letter to the Editor

“Wild Olympics” is an important issue for the residents of Clallam, Jefferson, and Grays Harbor counties. With the introduction of “The Wild Olympics Wilderness & Wild and Scenic River Act of 2012” on June 21st, this proposal will now be considered by Congress.

Although some modification from the original proposal has been made, I remain firmly opposed to the plan. I’m not alone – many local governments, community groups, and individual citizens have come out against it, contrary to what proponents say.

It’s very clear that this bill’s intent is to **not** correct a **current** problem, but to **preempt future use** options based on the assumption that future decisions will inherently be detrimental in nature.

Is it really the best environmental policy to lock up our land - on a false premise that our communities cannot be trusted - and then tell the rest of the world what to do with its land? Certainly not. If we are truly concerned about the environment then it is our duty to **show the rest of the world** how to do it. As an American, I’d have it no other way. We’ve always led by example, and now is no time to stop.

The Seattle Times categorized “Wild Olympics” this way: “The primary effect of the legislation is to prevent future administrations from opening up ancient forests and wild rivers to new logging, road building, mining, drilling or dams.” I ask why? Can’t we honor our land while enjoying not only its beauty but its natural resources too? With current technology and that of the future, surely there’s a way that we can do so.

In short, “Wild Olympics” would designate over 126,000 acres of Olympic National Forest land as “wilderness” and create new “Wild and Scenic” rivers on the Olympic Peninsula. While these designations sound innocent, they are very restrictive, and will cost our already depressed Peninsula economy good jobs in the timber industry.

Without good forest management, which may include selective logging, how are we going to prevent forest fires that might spread to developed areas? And, should a fire start, how are firefighters going to gain access without roads? Without roads, hunters will have to haul their kills out on their backs. Without roads, most of us will NOT have the opportunity to visit these beautiful areas.

Finally, it is clear **this bill will not be effective** for our communities and economy. The legislation as written does not include any estimate of the cost, and the Congressional Budget Office has not yet “scored” it. But, decommissioning (or tearing up) existing roads will surely cost money – don’t we have more pressing needs for our federal tax dollars? I remain firmly opposed.

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