



SIERRA
CLUB
FOUNDED 1892

CASCADE CHAPTER

The Hon. Maria Cantwell
U.S. Senate
511 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

February 26, 2008

Dear Senator Cantwell:

We appreciate your leadership in resolving the issues surrounding the need for a new fire station at Snoqualmie Pass. The Sierra Club can support the Snoqualmie Pass Land Conveyance Act (S. 2601) introduced by you and Senator Murray, as part of a broader effort to resolve the issues around development and wildlife connectivity in the Snoqualmie Pass vicinity.

We understand the need of the Snoqualmie Pass Fire District for a modern facility so that they can provide critical emergency services to those at the Pass and the thousands that travel through the area every day on Interstate 90. The current facility, leased from the national forest, is 70 years old and inadequate to serve the area. Since learning of this proposal, our intent has been to support their efforts to build a new station at a location that provides response times set out in national standards. The fire district has stated that a location on national forest land near exit 53 would provide the best response times for fires and accidents across their service area.

As you know, transferring national forest land, even for worthy projects, should not be done without compelling reasons. You have stated that an exception should be made in this particular circumstance because of the important public service provided by the Fire District, the heavy traffic and emergency calls created by non-residents in the area, the distance of Snoqualmie Pass from other communities with emergency services, and because of the high amount of federal land ownership in the area.

Such a move requires not only a compelling reason, but also the highest level of attention to the needs of the national forest resources in the area. In this case, maintaining and restoring wildlife connectivity at this upper elevation is needed to meet the objectives of the Northwest Forest Plan (Snoqualmie Pass Adaptive Management Area) and to assist with implementation of other laws such as the Endangered Species Act and Clean Water Act. We must offset the permanent impacts of the footprint and operation of the new facility, such as lost opportunities to restore habitat in this corridor. Thus, it is critical that we commit to the key elements of mitigation for this project before that legislation proceeds.

Thanks to your efforts, stakeholders, including the Sierra Club, were convened to discuss these issues. As a result, we came to an agreement that would allow the preferred site to be transferred to the Fire District as long as on-site and offsite mitigation were also done.

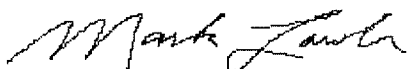
We appreciate your statements in the Congressional Record highlighting the importance of offsetting any potential impacts from construction of a new fire station and improving wildlife connectivity at the Pass. You encouraged the Forest Service to find additional lands to provide that needed connectivity. Your bill has reduced the acreage to be transferred to 1.5 acres, which lessens the impact.

The Sierra Club has been working with the Summit-at-Snoqualmie ski area, the Forest Service, Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT), Mountains to Sound Greenway, Cascade Land Conservancy (CLC) and others to conserve habitat lands in the area. We worked with the ski area to provide additional facilities while protecting important connectivity corridors and initiating studies to better understand the needs of wildlife at the Pass. We appreciate the funding that U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) has provided for land acquisition. However, with additional development pressure and shrinking habitat corridors, we need to redouble our efforts. These acquisitions should be near the proposed new fire station site. Lands immediately across I-90 and those near Mardee Lake are examples. We encourage your committee to provide support for this effort and to encourage the appropriations committee to provide the funds that the Forest Service needs to accomplish this.

We also agreed that it is important to minimize the impacts on site. This includes minimizing the footprint of buildings and pavement. The Fire District has committed to using best practices during construction on the site, which should include containing and treating run-off and installing native species landscaping. The project should maintain full buffers to existing wetlands and streams. Part of the planning will develop a snow storage system that will not degrade the adjacent habitat areas. The project should also restore the remainder of site to improve wildlife connectivity as described in the "Sensitive Areas Study" done by The Watershed Company in their report to the Fire District. This would include restoration of wetlands and uplands on both national forest and fire district lands.

We will continue to work with the Fire District, the Forest Service and others to achieve both a needed emergency facility and adequate wildlife connectivity at Snoqualmie Pass. We appreciate your support in that effort.

Sincerely,



Mark Lawler
Chair
National Forests Committee
3728 Woodlawn Avenue North
Seattle, Washington 98103