

SOUTH KING

FIRE & RESCUE



www.southkingfire.org

April 10, 2007

Senator Maria Cantwell
Senate Office Building
511 Dirksen
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Cantwell:

I am writing to you as the Fire Chief of South King Fire & Rescue in King County, Washington, as well as a member of the Board of Directors of the Washington Fire Chiefs, with regards to an issue affecting a fire department jointly located in King and Kittitas Counties. The fire department is a fire district located at Snoqualmie Pass, one of the major west/east passageways through the Cascade Mountain range here in Washington State. The issue involves one of acquiring land to improve their fire department level of service.

I ask that you consider King and Kittitas Counties Fire District #51 (Snoqualmie Pass Fire and Rescue) request for support of the following **Federal Legislation: HR 1285, The Snoqualmie Pass Land Conveyance Act**, and a proposed Senate Companion Bill. The purpose of this legislation is to convey a parcel of Forest Service Land to the Fire District for the purpose of building a new fire station at Snoqualmie Pass.

Background Information Provided by SPFR Elected Officials

Currently Snoqualmie Pass Fire and Rescue's (SPFR) fire station sits on land that is leased by the U.S. Forest Service. Last year the Forest Service contacted SPFR to ask if the Fire Department would be interested in purchasing the land that the fire station currently sits on.

Apparently, the U.S. Forest Service has many isolated parcels of land and this tract of land, and other nearby parcels, do not fit in the Forest Service's mission. It is also important to note that these parcels became isolated years ago when other Forest Service land was transferred to the Washington State Department of Transportation for the purpose of building Interstate-90. The result, in the Snoqualmie Pass area, was that some parcels became isolated and of little value to the Forest Service.

SPFR does not have the resources to purchase land for a desperately needed new fire station. In fact, the current fire station was never built to operate as a fire station. Rather, it was originally built in the 1930's as a maintenance shed for the Department of Transportation.

The existing building has numerous deficiencies, including but not limited to: a non-complaint electrical system; apparatus bays that are neither long enough nor wide enough for current emergency apparatus; the lack of a smoke alarm or sprinkler system; no decontamination area for cleaning equipment after emergency medical incidents; inadequate training and exercise areas; and the roof sheds snow in front of the apparatus bays. This is particularly problematic because many times the snow will slide off the roof when the station siren sounds to alert volunteer firefighters of an emergency incident, leaving up to a four foot ridge of snow and ice in front of the emergency apparatus which prevents a response until it is cleared. Furthermore, there is a hill leading down from the station to the road that is very difficult to negotiate during the winter because of ice and snow. This list is not all inclusive, but it points to the needed replacement of the nearly 80 year old building.

The parcel of land that SPFR is asking for potential conveyance is more centrally located and allows the dedicated volunteer staff closer access, which will decrease emergency response times. The new location also has faster and better access to Interstate-90 in both directions improving emergency responses. The proposed location will also be able to provide a dedicated helipad for Airlift Northwest, an emergency helicopter transport service which allows patients to be rapidly extricated and flown to a hospital for treatment. Lastly, acquiring this parcel will allow the construction of a new fire station without disrupting current operations and at a reduced cost to SPFR. This parcel of land is located on the Exit 53 interchange, directly across from the Mountaineers Snoqualmie Campus.

Huge Benefit – The proposed new location of the Fire Department would decrease response times. Many homes within the Snoqualmie Pass area are directly adjacent to U.S. Forest Service Land and other public lands. Having the fire department in a more central location would increase the likelihood that if a home caught fire that the fire department could prevent its spreading to U.S. Forest Service and other Public lands.

About the Community and the Department

There are 24 dedicated volunteer fire fighter/EMT's (emergency medical technicians) serving the Snoqualmie Pass community of 350 full-time residents that peaks to 1,500 citizens during the ski season. Additionally, the ski area estimates 20,000 patrons on a busy weekend. The Department of Transportation estimates that up to 60,000 vehicles will travel through the fire district on a busy day, making it the busiest mountain highway in the country.

SPFR protects Interstate-90 in both directions of Snoqualmie Pass, an area which is prone to rock slides and avalanches. It is not uncommon for this community to be isolated for hours or even days at a time. Several thousand people can be stranded at Snoqualmie Pass when the Pass (I-90) is closed and while the Department of Transportation works to get the roads back open. This, alone, can be very taxing on local resources.

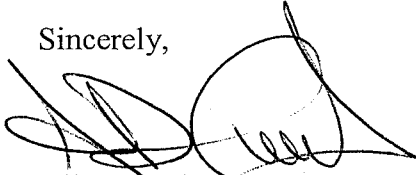
The Fire Department is currently averaging over 300 calls a year with about a 10 percent annual increase in call volumes. Furthermore, 84% of those incidents will be for non-tax paying residents. Consequently, SPFR has the characteristics of a large city with the limited resources of a small community.

Summary

The **Snoqualmie Pass Land Conveyance Act** would be a huge jump start on a very important project for an under-funded volunteer fire department serving a huge population (essentially anyone that travels over Snoqualmie Pass on Interstate-90). Please give this piece of legislation your strong consideration.

Thank you on behalf of the fire service in King County!!!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Church', with a large, stylized flourish extending to the right.

Allen D. Church
Fire Chief/Administrator
South King Fire and Rescue