



Washington Association of Churches

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October 5, 2004

The Honorable Richard Pombo
1324 Longworth House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515

The Honorable Nick J. Rahall
1329 Longworth House Office Building
United States House of Representatives
Washington D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman and Mr. Ranking Member:

As leaders of faith communities in Washington State, we view caring for God's creation as an important moral and religious obligation. We also view protection of the environment as a responsibility shared by all.

In anticipation that your committee will soon consider legislation to permanently protect the Wild Sky area as wilderness, we are writing to express our enthusiastic support for the Wild Sky Wilderness Act (H.R. 822; S 391). Regretfully, we cannot support the recently proffered surrogate legislation (H.R. 5083) because it does not realize the high stewardship values or match the wilderness spirit of the original Wild Sky legislation.

These forests are important for a number of reasons. We believe we have a sacred obligation to protect the marvelous world God has given us, including its life-giving waters and myriad of plant and animal species. The Wild Sky forests provides essential habitat for endangered and other sensitive species such as northern spotted owl, marbled murrelet, bald eagle, mountain goat, and pileated woodpecker, and the rivers provide critical habitat for salmon and steelhead. Wild Sky will also protect existing opportunities for recreation.

We have an obligation because, as the Scriptures tell us, the earth is not ours, but God's: "The Earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof" (Psalm 24:1-2). We are tenants charged with creation's watchful care, instructed to "keep" the garden (Genesis 2:15). As God told the Israelites, "the land is mine, and you . . . have become my tenants" (Leviticus 25:23).

In addition, wild forest areas testify to God's glory, revealing a part of the entirety of creation that God has declared "very good" (Genesis 1:31). Perhaps that is one reason why walking in a pristine forest can bring us into closer communion with God. Whether contemplating the small climbing vine or the gigantic fir or cedar, we are reminded once again that "the Lord has done great things!" (Joel 2:21).

Let us together be humble in the face of God and God's creation. Let us protect the remnants of wild creation while we still can, for the sake of our faith, our children, future generations, and God's myriad creatures. We hope and pray that the entire Washington State Congressional Delegation and the United States Congress will support this act of stewardship in the days and weeks ahead.

Blessings,

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