



August 21, 2018

Senator Lisa Murkowski, Chairman
Senate Energy & Natural Resources
Committee
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Maria Cantwell, Ranking Member
Senate Energy & Natural Resources
Committee
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Mike Lee, Chairman
Senate Energy & Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests,
and Mining
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Ron Wyden, Ranking Member
Senate Energy & Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests,
and Mining
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Chairman Murkowski and Lee and Ranking Member Cantwell and Wyden:

On behalf of the American Forest Resource Council (AFRC) and its members, I appreciate the opportunity to comment on S. 483, the “Wild Olympics Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.”

AFRC and its members care deeply about the health and sustainability of public forestlands. In fact, the business model and future success of AFRC members is *dependent* upon the responsible management, ecological health, and long-term sustainability of our nation’s federal forests and Washington Department of Natural Resources lands.

AFRC and its members also care deeply about the vitality of rural communities in which they work, live, and recreate. Our members employ thousands of rural Washingtonians, generating tens of millions of dollars in economic benefits to communities and the State – to say nothing of the charitable contributions, volunteer hours, scholarships, sponsorships, and investments our members make in their communities.

In addition to specific concerns about some of the areas proposed for Wilderness and Wild and Scenic designations and likely impacts to future access and management of the forest, our overarching concern is that S. 483 does not address the real challenges facing these local communities.

The Olympic National Forest needs a comprehensive solution for the long-term economic, social, and conservation needs of the Olympic Peninsula.

While the Seattle area has one of the fastest growing economies in the country, the Olympic Peninsula has an unemployment rate 50 percent higher than the national average. Many of these rural communities are experiencing an economic and social crisis. Our industry has the capacity and expertise to manufacture local, carbon friendly, sustainable forest products and is poised to create more family-wage jobs and economic activity in these hard-hit communities – but only if AFRC members can reliably access additional raw material. Restoring a more sustainable level of harvest to the Olympic National Forest (NF) is critical to achieving economic, social, and conservation goals.

Yet, over the past two decades, timber harvests on the Olympic NF have fallen over 90 percent due to litigation, analysis paralysis, and well-intentioned but disastrously implemented federal policies. Today, we are harvesting just three percent of annual *growth* on the Olympic NF and only 13 percent of the timber volume that *dies* each year. Meanwhile, essential community services across the Peninsula like law enforcement, mental health, education, and road maintenance have been devastated by a reduction in economic activity and timber receipt revenue.

The Olympic NF already includes 100,000 acres of wilderness that is off-limits to responsible, multiple-use management. Ninety-five percent of the 922,651-acre Olympic National Park is also wilderness. Combined, 63 percent of the federal land on the Olympic Peninsula is already designated wilderness. Prohibiting responsible forest management and other multi-use activities on an additional 125,000 acres of the Olympic NF will not address the pressing social and economic needs of rural, forested communities on the Peninsula or result in additional conservation outcomes.

As this summer demonstrated, wildfires are also a growing threat to forests, watersheds, wildlife, and communities on the Olympic Peninsula as longer and drier summers become increasingly common in the Pacific Northwest. In fact, at the time of this writing, the Maple Fire is burning 2,000 acres on the Olympic Peninsula, primarily on the Olympic NF. The fire has resulted in evacuations and the closure of roads and trails. Other recent examples include the Paradise Fire (2015) and the Hayes Fire (2016), which burned on the “wet” western and northern slopes of the Olympic Peninsula – the Paradise Fire burned clear into November. The Olympic Peninsula is a popular destination for tourism and outdoor recreation, both of which are negatively impacted by wildfires and underscore the importance of maintaining the ability of the Forest Service to proactively manage these areas.

Congress should seek balanced, comprehensive solutions with wide stakeholder support rather than stand-alone wilderness legislation.

Since it was first introduced in 2012, the Wild Olympics proposal has generated tremendous controversy in communities across the Peninsula. Instead of bringing people together, it has driven people apart. While changes have been made to address some of these concerns raised by our industry, neighboring private landowners, and local communities, the proposal remains highly controversial. It also compounds years of frustration about the paralysis affecting the management of the Olympic NF and new threats to predictable, sustainable timber supplies from state trust lands in the form of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s Marbled Murrelet Long Term Conservation Strategy.

There is growing consensus and support for increasing timber harvests on the Olympic NF. The Olympic Forest Collaborative is bringing together stakeholders from the environmental community, the timber industry, and representatives from federal and local government around shared goals of increasing timber harvests while benefiting the environmental quality of the forests and watersheds. The group is making progress to identify a more sustainable approach to managing the Olympic NF – including discussions about the most appropriate areas for ongoing, scientifically-sound, sustainable timber management. AFRC and its members have invested significant time and resources in this collaborative effort initiated by Rep. Derek Kilmer (D-WA) to find areas of agreement.

AFRC has also identified key barriers to implementing a sustainable timber program on the Olympic NF, which is still operating under the 1994 Clinton Northwest Forest Plan (NWFP). After nearly 25 years of implementation and observation, it is clear that provisions of that forest plan are severely limiting the ability of the Olympic NF to increase timber harvests, including costly and time-consuming Survey and Manage requirements, unscientific restrictions on harvesting all trees over 80 years old, and a lack of land designated for ongoing, sustainable timber management. Our industry raised these issues early in the development of the Wild Olympics legislation. Unfortunately, our proposed solutions for a balanced, holistic approach to the Olympic NF were never included in the legislation.

AFRC has been, and will continue to be, a proactive and constructive partner in helping to find balanced, comprehensive solutions to the challenges facing our forests and rural communities. We believe in compromise and finding realistic and implementable solutions. AFRC and its members not only spend significant time and effort on the Olympic Collaborative, but on collaboration efforts across the West. AFRC is also investing legal resources to defend collaborative projects from litigation, including the collaboratively driven and supported A-Z project in northeast Washington.

Initiatives that advance shared goals and require compromise are the essence of the collaborative process. No stakeholder gets everything they want, but every constructive partner at the table gets something they don't currently have. Unfortunately, S. 483 does not strike that balance. It prioritizes one aspect of complex land management challenges without recognizing the needs of all stakeholders. That is why AFRC cannot support the bill in its current form.

We look forward to working with members of the Washington Congressional delegation and the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee on legislation that will address the economic, social, and conservation needs of the Olympic Peninsula.

Sincerely,



Travis Joseph
President

cc: Senator Patty Murray
Congressman Derek Kilmer
Chairman Rob Bishop, House Natural Resources Committee