

Rep. Kim Schrier
Testimony (H.R. 2816)
NPFPL Legislative Hearing
July 13, 2021

- Thank you Chairman Neguse, Ranking Member Fulcher, and members of the Subcommittee for inviting me to testify on my bill, *Legacy Roads and Trails* today.
- Before I get started, however, I want to note how pleased I am to see the REPLANT Act considered at this hearing as well. Our forests are dying and burning at alarming rates because of climate change and the REPLANT Act is a pragmatic approach that can help us address our growing reforestation backlog. I am proud to support this bill with my friend and colleague, Representative Jimmy Panetta.
- I recently reintroduced the Legacy Roads and Trails Act with Chairman Neguse and Representatives Mike Simpson and Derek Kilmer. It will authorize the Legacy Roads and Trails Remediation program through 2030 and require the Forest Service to develop a national strategy to carry out the program.
- For those of you that don't know, Legacy Roads and Trails is a US Forest Service program which leverages public and private funding to improve or decommission forest roads and trails in areas where the infrastructure is deteriorating, and as a result threatening endangered species, impacting water quality, and restricting access to recreation in our public lands. The program was created in 2008 because the general Forest Service road maintenance budget was unable to address the sheer volume of blocked culverts, landslides and washouts which were specifically impacting water quality and access for threatened and endangered species.
- Legacy Roads is unique because it prioritizes water quality and watershed health, with the goal of protecting American rivers and streams, endangered fish, and community water systems with targeted projects.
- A few examples of such projects are: repairing roads and trails used for public access, replacing failed or undersized culverts to reconnect fish habitat, and stormproofing or reclaiming roads to prevent sediment pollution from entering waterways important for fish and drinking water.
- Legacy Roads and Trails works because it is targeted, results-oriented, and collaborative. Funds primarily go to actual work on the ground, creating high wage jobs for contractors, including those who specialize in stream restoration, environmental design, and heavy equipment operation.
- And it successfully attracts non-federal investment as well. Over half of the money used for fish passage and culvert projects comes from external partners, amplifying the impacts of federal funds.
- With its proven track record, the Legacy Roads and Trails Program enjoys broad bipartisan support and partner engagement. Few programs deliver such environmental, recreational, and economic benefits.
- In my district, the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest comprises 82% of Chelan County.
- Over the past twenty years, Chelan County has been systematically working to restore fish passage in our national forests with the sort of projects Legacy Roads and Trails supports.

- The economic benefits of these public lands are also considerable. More than 3000 jobs in Chelan and Douglas counties are supported by outdoor recreation, comprising 20 percent of private regional employment in those counties.
- This is not unique to Washington State.
- From 2008 to 2017, the Forest Service used this program very successfully, benefiting forests, waterways and outdoor recreation while creating jobs and saving taxpayer money. Despite the considerable improvements the program brought to Forest Service watersheds, there has been no funding for the program since 2018.
- However, the need for this program remains great. The Forest Service has identified a backlog of over **\$3.5 billion** in deferred maintenance for roads, nearly **400** high priority culvert projects that cost almost **\$110M** just for one year. LRT is ideally shaped to begin addressing these needs once again.
- As we face the increasing threat of climate change and the need to improve our nation's crumbling infrastructure, we must ensure programs like Legacy Roads and Trails are part of the dialogue. This is a big win for our environment, our fish, and our forests.
- Again, thank you Mr. Chairman, and thank you to the wonderful staff at the Natural Resources Committee, for your hard work on all these important bills and for inviting me to share my enthusiasm for the Legacy Roads and Trails program.