



May 2, 2007

Honorable Norm Dicks  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2467 Rayburn House Office Bldg.  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Congressman Dicks:

I am writing on behalf of the Olympic Forest Coalition (OFCO), an organization focused on the Olympic Peninsula, with the majority of our members residing in that region. OFCO has a mission to protect and restore forest and aquatic ecosystems on public land of the Olympic Peninsula.

We urgently request your support for increased funding in the Forest Service's FY 2008 budget for watershed restoration and road decommissioning work in the Olympic National Forest.

Poorly maintained Forest Service roads pose a significant threat to water quality and salmon recovery on the Olympic Peninsula. As reported in the Aberdeen Daily World on April 25, "Nearly 2,170 miles of primitive roads meander through the Olympic National Forest, but poor maintenance and inadequate funding have left nearly half of those roads one big storm away from a washout." The Forest Service has proposed to close and decommission over 800 miles of roads in the Olympic National Forest, but little funding is available to accomplish this work. Inadequate funding for maintenance of the remaining forests also threatens access to trailheads and other recreational sites.

The Olympic National Forest is very fragile. For decades, but especially in the 1980's, the level of over-logging has left a fragmented forest—with failing watersheds. The consensus prediction on the part of scientists at the Climate Impacts Group at the University of Washington is that there will be more frequent and severe storms in this area—thus more roads will fail. Prevention is far less expensive than repair after the fact. The potential for flooding and harm to salmon habitat is growing.

In a state-wide effort to reduce the impacts of Forest Service roads, the State of Washington, western Washington treaty tribes and a dozen conservation groups are working together on a Watershed Restoration Initiative. The Initiative is requesting \$30 million annually for the next 10 years to fund Forest Service road decommissioning, stabilization, and maintenance, with initial focus on watersheds in the Olympic and Mount Baker-Snoqualmie national forests that flow into Puget Sound and Hood Canal. We strongly support this Initiative and encourage you to help fund it.

Unfortunately, the President's FY 2008 budget request proposes to reduce funding for Forest Service road decommissioning. According to the agency's budget justification, the President is proposing to reduce road decommissioning funds nationwide by nearly half, compared to 2006 funding. At the same time, the budget also calls for a significant increase in Pacific Northwest timber sales and associated road building, which will only exacerbate the Olympic's road and watershed problems. Recently funded levels in northwest Washington national forests already exceed long-term levels envisioned in the Northwest Forest Plan. On the Olympic, for example, the "probably sale quantity" under the plan is 10 million board feet per year, but the forest is funded this year to sell roughly 25 million board feet. We respectfully request that funding for Northwest Forest Plan implementation should provide greater priority to fix existing road problems and improve watershed health, while reducing emphasis on additional timber sales.

The Olympic Forest Coalition reviews all timber sales on the Olympic National Forest. Unfortunately, although it is possible to design thinning sales with no or few roads, this Forest continues to build timber sales with excess road miles, only making worse the condition of watersheds. This direction is opposite of what both the Olympic and Mt. Baker-Snoqualmie National Forests took in the early 1990's when they worked together on a Watershed Initiative.

During that time I worked for an organization called the Western Ancient Forest Campaign (now known as the American Lands Alliance) and was privileged to attend the Watershed Restoration Conference you held in Tacoma, with Vice President (at that time) Al Gore giving the keynote address. Thus I remember you as an early champion of this important work.

OFCO and our colleagues in Washington State also recognize and appreciate your efforts to address fish passage problems with Forest Service road culverts, along with many other initiatives to benefit salmon recovery on the Olympic Peninsula. We look forward to working with you to build on these efforts to restore watersheds and improve salmon habitat in the Olympic National Forest.

Sincerely,

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