

## **Collaboration, not transfer, is the solution to public land management**

Rep. Dan Newhouse held a listening session on the state of public lands on Wednesday, October 12<sup>th</sup> in Wenatchee, Washington.

Newhouse was joined by Rep. Rob Bishop, Chairman of the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Natural Resources, who has been a leading critic of public land management agencies and part of the national discussion about the transfer of our nation's public lands.

The listening session focused on many of the challenges facing our public lands, yet there was little talk about transferring our public lands. This is a breath of fresh air. Transfer or sale of America's public lands is not a solution to public land management challenges. The answer is public land users and state and federal agencies working together to craft collaborative solutions for America's public lands.

There is recognition on the importance of public lands not only for recreation, ecosystem diversity and timber production, but also the protection of water supplies that feed communities, agricultural and our rivers and streams. This diversity of uses creates management challenges, but in Washington we have proven track record of diverse interests working out complex natural resource issues. For instance, the Yakima Basin Integrated Plan is a balanced package of actions to address water scarcity issues in ways that will help restore salmon and steelhead fisheries, improve water quality and quantity, and support a healthy agricultural and recreational economy.

The plan was agreed upon by a diverse coalition of conservation groups, irrigation, farmers, sportsmen and women, local, state, and federal governments and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation. We've shown that by working collaboratively at a watershed level, we can craft and implement long term solutions.

Similarly, public land issues like firefighting budgets, road maintenance, access to public lands, trail clearing, important programs like Payments in Lieu of Taxes, (PILT)\* to offset losses in property taxes, and the dwindling funding to manage public lands are the things that we need to work together to solve.

We support the effort to get out into communities to listen and understand these issues - this is the first step. The next step is for Congress to pass widely supported, bipartisan legislation that addresses these challenges. First and foremost, our land management agencies need adequate resources to soundly manage public lands. However, Congress has been unwilling or unable able to pass commonsense legislation to address funding issues like fire borrowing, that is, the practice of raiding agency funds earmarked for other priorities and using them to battle wildfires.

Any honest discussion about federal land management needs to start with ensuring that our agencies have the funding and resources necessary to be good land managers. These are the types of discussions that will lead to real solutions for issues like tackling

the backlog of road and trail maintenance, or getting a handle on the massive expenses of fighting wildfires.

In this day and age of divisions and polarization of opinions, being an absolutist begets little progress. We must listen to each other, plan and find collaborative ways to tackle 21st century land management challenges.

Transferring or selling public lands is and never will be the answer. Only level-headed and thoughtful solutions will begin to address the challenges we face.

Tim Gavin  
Yakima Fly Fishers Association  
Trout Unlimited Chapter 094

Lisa Pelly  
Director Washington Water Project, Trout Unlimited

\*"Payments in Lieu of Taxes" (**PILT**) are Federal payments to local governments that help offset losses in property taxes due to non-taxable Federal lands within their boundaries. The key law is Public Law 94-565, dated October 20, 1976.