

STATEMENT OF STEPHANIE TOOTHMAN, ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR, CULTURAL RESOURCES, PARTNERSHIPS, AND SCIENCE, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, BEFORE THE SENATE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS OF THE ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE, CONCERNING H.R. 1158, TO DIRECT THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR TO CONTINUE STOCKING FISH IN CERTAIN LAKES IN THE NORTH CASCADES NATIONAL PARK, ROSS LAKE NATIONAL RECREATION AREA, AND LAKE CHELAN NATIONAL RECREATION AREA.

JULY 31, 2013

Mr. Chairman, thank you for the opportunity to provide the Department of the Interior's views on H.R. 1158, a bill to direct the Secretary of the Interior to continue stocking fish in certain lakes in North Cascades National Park, Ross Lake National Recreation Area, and Lake Chelan National Recreation Area (hereafter referred to as "North Cascades Complex").

The Department does not oppose H.R. 1158 if amended in accordance with this testimony.

The National Park Service collectively manages North Cascades National Park, Ross Lake National Recreation Area, and Lake Chelan National Recreation Area as North Cascades National Park Service Complex. All of the 245 mountain lakes in the North Cascades Complex area were naturally fishless. Fish stocking in this area began in the late 1800s. During this period, approximately 91 lakes were stocked at one time or another and 154 lakes were never stocked. This fish stocking provided the opportunity to fish in these mountain lakes. The issue of continued fish stocking arose in 1968 when the proposal to create the park was introduced. Although the enabling legislation does reference the requirement for a Washington state fishing license, it is silent regarding fish stocking. Stocking continued after the park was established. However, concerns over the ecological impacts of fish stocking in naturally fish-free waters continued. Soon after the park complex was created, the National Park Service policy regarding fish stocking was revised to provide that fish stocking in naturally fish-free waters should not occur. Fish stocking was phased out in many national parks across the country to restore natural conditions and to preserve native species. In 1988, Congress designated ninety-three percent of the North Cascades as the Stephen Mather Wilderness, and 90 of the 91 lakes that had historically been stocked are within the wilderness area. At the time the wilderness was designated, Congress did not address the issue of stocking the lakes.

The 2006 Management Policies of the National Park Service (NPS) allow for the management of fish populations when necessary to restore resources to their natural state or reestablish a native species that has been extirpated. Stocking of other plants or animals is also allowed under certain circumstances. Specifically, the policies provide that "*In some special situations, the Service may stock native or exotic animals for recreational harvesting purposes, but only when such stocking will not unacceptably impact park natural resources or processes and when:*

- *the stocking is of fish into constructed large reservoirs or other significantly altered large water bodies and the purpose is to provide for recreational fishing; or*

- *the intent for stocking is a treaty right or expressed in statute, applicable law, or a House or Senate report accompanying a statute.*

The Service will not stock waters that are naturally barren of harvested aquatic species.”

The NPS appreciates the collaborative partnership with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) at North Cascades Complex and throughout the State of Washington. Despite this strong working relationship, a number of challenges have historically arisen when trying to reconcile the missions and policies of the WDFW and NPS on this stocking program. However, multiple attempts have been made to negotiate a mutually acceptable outcome on this issue. For example, in 1987 the Assistant Secretary of the Interior, Fish and Wildlife and Parks negotiated an agreement allowing fish stocking to continue in certain lakes while research into the ecological impacts of stocking was conducted. In a 1991 Consent Decree resolving litigation challenging the fish stocking program, NPS agreed to conduct research into the ecological impacts of fish stocking at North Cascades and a National Environmental Policy Act review of the stocking of naturally fish-free lakes.

A decade of research, conducted in the North Cascades Complex through Oregon State University and the USGS Biological Resources Division, documented lakes where fish had been stocked in low numbers and could not reproduce. No statistically significant ecological effects to native aquatic species were detected. However, in self-sustaining populations, non-native trout can have significant effects on native aquatic organisms such as amphibians and zooplankton.

In 2002, the NPS in collaboration with WDFW began development of a comprehensive Mountain Lakes Fishery Management Plan/Environmental Impact Statement (Plan/EIS). The purpose of the planning effort was to apply the results of the research and resolve the longstanding conflict over fish stocking in the mountain lakes.

On November 26, 2008, the NPS issued a Record of Decision for the final Plan/EIS and selected the preferred alternative, which would stop stocking and remove fish from lakes where significant impacts were occurring (49 lakes) but allow stocking of non-reproducing fish at low densities to continue in up to 42 lakes, subject to additional monitoring. The EIS found that such stocking would not unacceptably impact park natural resources or processes in those lakes.

However, the Record of Decision (ROD) also notes that fish stocking in the Stephen T. Mather Wilderness does not meet the minimum requirements analysis conducted under section 4(c) of the Wilderness Act. In addition, the ROD recognizes that the NPS would need legal authority to implement the preferred alternative. The ROD further provides that if such legal authority was not provided to the NPS by July 1, 2009, the NPS, consistent with NPS policy, would discontinue the stocking program in its entirety and work to restore the natural ecology of all the mountain lakes. In the majority of lakes this would be accomplished through continued fishing without further stocking. Over time, natural mortality would remove the remainder. In lakes where naturally reproducing populations were found, the NPS would work to remove these fish. Realistically, at least ten lakes are so large that no known removal techniques will work and fish populations will remain for the foreseeable future.

The NPS is interested in ensuring that any legislation regarding fish stocking is guided by science and an understanding of the impact that such policy decisions would have on park resources. We note that the bill directs the Secretary to continue monitoring the impacts of fish stocking in order to determine if further adjustments are needed to protect aquatic resources.

Fish stocking has not occurred in any lakes within the North Cascades Complex since 2007. During that time, there have been no requests for additional stocking from either the public or from the WDFW, as they no longer consider fish stocking a priority.

Since non-native fish removal efforts began in 2009, we have seen an almost immediate return of native amphibians, which is an indicator of a more resilient ecosystem. With our improved awareness of the negative resource impacts of climate change, we now understand the importance of eliminating environmental stressors, such as non-native fish species. Thus, we feel that NPS needs the management flexibility to respond to changing environmental conditions, including climate change.

To ensure the NPS has the management flexibility to respond appropriately should monitoring and scientific research indicate negative impacts to resources from fish stocking, we strongly recommend one amendment. We ask that Section 3 (a) be amended to read as follows: “Subject to subsection (b), the Secretary may authorize the stocking of fish in lakes in the North Cascades National Park Service Complex.”

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my prepared remarks. I would be pleased to answer any questions you or other members of the Subcommittee may have.