



Opening Statement
Senator Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.)
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Hearing on S. 556, The Bipartisan Sportsmen's Act of 2015
March 12, 2015

“Thank you Chairwoman Murkowski, I appreciate your calling this important hearing and your leadership. And I too look forward to hearing from our witnesses today.

Although similar sportsmen-related legislation has been considered on the floor in the past two Congresses, this is the first time we have discussed this package in committee, and I hope we can use this opportunity to further examine and improve some of the specific provisions in the legislation.

I would like to also take this opportunity to discuss the larger issue of stewardship and what that does for us and how it continues to give us expanded recreational opportunities for sportsmen on public land.

In the state of Washington, we are fortunate to live among many of America's most iconic national parks, forests and wilderness areas.

These public treasures improve our quality of life dramatically, give us important recreational opportunities — including hunting and fishing — and strengthening our economy. Last year, visitors spent a combined 33 million days on Federal lands in Washington State, and in doing so, spent over \$1.3 billion. According to a recent report prepared by the Jackson Foundation, in the state of Washington alone, outdoor recreation provides an estimated 227,000 direct jobs, that's an amazing number, and it generates over \$7 billion in wages and salaries. So this is a very important part of our economy and we should make sure that we continue to focus on it.

The best thing we can do to continue to protect open spaces and wildlife habitat for hunting, fishing, and other recreational opportunities is to ensure that the Land and Water Conservation Fund is permanently authorized and fully funded.

To achieve this goal, I support language in this bill to set aside a portion of Land and Water Conservation Fund each year to secure public access to Federal lands for hunting, fishing, and recreational uses.

So, if we allow the Land and Water Conservation Fund to expire-which we don't want it to do-there won't be any money for the sportsmen that we want in this particular legislation.

The Land and Water Conservation Fund is the country's most successful law benefitting sportsmen — and it needs to be reauthorized.

In my state, it has helped protect and improve over 133,000 acres of state and local parks and recreation areas, as well as help protect our public lands, national parks, forests lands.

Earlier this year, a strong bipartisan group of senators supported reauthorization and permanent funding for the Land and Water Conservation Fund in a vote on the Senate floor. I look forward to working with you on this issue as these pieces of legislation move through the congress.

This bill includes a separate land acquisition provision, the reauthorization of the Federal Land Transaction Facilitation Act. While I support the reauthorization, I am concerned with language in this bill that may fundamentally alter the purpose of the Act, so we want to drill down on that.

This law authorizes the Bureau of Land Management to sell Federal lands identified as appropriate for sale, through a robust public planning process. It then uses the proceeds from these sales to acquire — from willing sellers — privately owned lands within Federal conservation areas.

The BLM's authority to sell lands under this law expired in 2011, and I have supported past efforts in this committee to reauthorize it.

Also, I am concerned, however, that instead of using the proceeds from these sales to acquire and protect public lands, this bill could siphon some of those proceeds off to the Treasury for deficit reduction- so we want to look at that.

The policy shift from the version of the bill this Committee has previously supported, where Federal land sale proceeds were used to acquire other important lands for future generations is an additional issue to look at. I hope we will amend this bill to reflect the language we have previously supported in this Committee.

Once again, I want to thank you personally for your leadership on making sure that bow hunters are covered in this legislation thank you for giving them parity with other hunters. I very much appreciate that. And once again, I believe that a clean reauthorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund is a subject that is going to be very important for sportsmen in general.

Along those lines, I would also note that protecting hunting and fishing opportunities on public lands is an important priority. And making sure that we are protecting them other recreational uses on public lands is important.

According to the Bureau of Land Management, 99.98 percent of BLM lands are open to hunting today; and almost 99 percent are open to shooting.

While the Forest Service doesn't have detailed land use statistics available, the vast majority of national forest lands are also open for hunting, fishing, and shooting.

Federal land use policies should be designed to encourage getting as many people as possible out into their national parks, forests, and public lands.

It is my understanding that both the Forest Service and BLM open lands they manage for hunting, fishing, shooting and other recreational uses unless an area is specifically closed.

With that in mind, it's simply worth noting that land use statistics don't indicate a policy of excessive closure of federal lands.

And if we are going to legislate new management policies, we must ensure that any changes protect all recreational uses on public lands.

With that I look forward to hearing from the witnesses this morning. Again madam chair thank you for convening us this important topic."

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