

Congress of the United States**Washington, DC 20515**

May 17, 2002

The Honorable John Ashcroft
Attorney General
Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, D.C. 20530

Dear General Ashcroft:

Last month a group of leaders from Washington met with top staff from your Department to discuss the state's landmark environmental initiative, the Forests and Fish Agreement. In 1999 the federal government reached agreement with the State of Washington, many treaty Tribes, counties and large and small timberland owners regarding forest practices on non-federal forestland in our state. The Forests and Fish Agreement was reached after more than two years of the dedicated work by a large number of Washington state's top political leaders and technical experts. Their mission was focused on significantly improving the state's forest practices program to address protection for native salmonids.

We believe that the Forests and Fish Agreement, which improves state forest practices on non-federal lands to meet the requirements of federal environmental laws, is a model for how the federal government should interact with state and local governments and private landowners. Federal agencies involved in the Agreement included the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, National Marine Fisheries Service and Environmental Protection Agency. The members of the state's Congressional delegation have worked closely with all the Forests and Fish Agreement participants since 1999, and have supported considerable federal appropriations to match state funds required to implement the Agreement particularly in terms of process and reaching an acceptable outcome in protecting public resources. It is also a critical piece of Washington State's efforts to improve and enhance our region's salmon runs.

The State of Washington, in a letter dated February 14, 2002, has indicated its intent to pursue a Section 10 Agreement –or Habitat Conservation Plan (HCP) – as was anticipated in the Forests and Fish Report (FFR). This is one of the last steps in finalizing the federal assurances under the provisions of the FFR. The previous three major steps were (1) the enactment of FFR into law (state legislation passed in 1999), (2) adoption of permanent forest practices rules implementing the state law (permanent rules under RCW 76.09 were adopted in June 2001), and (3) federal and state funding as described above.

We are writing to ask you to support the efforts to complete both the Section 10 process and a 4(s) exemption-process. This should be possible, given the substance of the Agreement is completed and in place. What remains to be completed, however, is (1) a NEPA review of the FFR-based forest practices rules, which should be relatively easy if the NEPA review can be combined with the already completed SEPA review under state

law, (2) the completion of applications for 4(d) exemption and a Section 10 Habitat Conservation Plan and incidental take permit, and (3) completion of the Section 10 implementation agreement. None of these can be accomplished without policy leadership from Washington, D.C. and support in the region.

We are requesting that you appoint a team of policy leaders in Washington D.C. to see that federal assurances under the Forests and Fish Agreement are accomplished.

Thank you for your consideration of our request. If we can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Best regards,

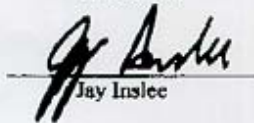

Jennifer Dunn

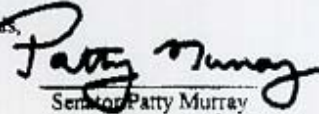

Senator Maria Cantwell

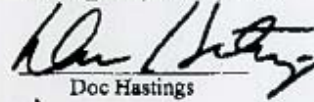

George R. Nethercutt Jr.

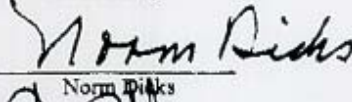

Jim McDermott

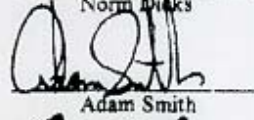

Brian Baird

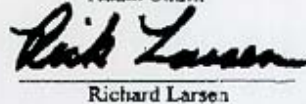

Jay Inslee


Senator Patty Murray


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