



Why this election matters to the outdoors sector

GUEST OPINION

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and
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Washington may be best known as the home of Microsoft and Boeing, but the outdoors is also big business in our state. More than 115,000 Washington residents are employed by small businesses across the state because of the inspiring opportunities here to fish, hike, hunt, climb, sail and camp. It is only common sense, then, that congressional candidates hoping to represent us in the other Washington address the policies that sustain and grow outdoors-dependent jobs here.

Outdoor activities such as fishing, hunting, hiking, sailing and climbing contribute more than \$11.7 billion annually to Washington's economy, generate \$650 million in annual state tax revenue and produce \$8.5 billion annually in retail sales and services. The 115,000 jobs now filled by Washington residents because of this robust economic activity include not only hotel clerks and outfitters, but also product designers, marketing directors, accountants and warehouse managers, to name a few.

We're lucky to make a living doing something we love, and helping other people to get outside to enjoy doing what they love. The Outdoor Industry Association reports that the outdoor recreation industry thrived during the recession and grew at a rate of 5 percent annually. But sustaining that growth requires smart policies from Washington — locally and in the other Washington.

Every industry needs attention from state and federal government to tax and trade issues. But our small businesses also look to our elected officials in Congress for leadership on federal policies and programs that support the primary need of our customers: to get outdoors. We encourage congressional candidates to take a look at these public-lands issues:

— To enjoy the great outdoors, the people of Washington state count on the little-known Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) to protect public lands such as Mount Rainier and Olympic national parks, the Pacific Crest Trail, the Cascade Ecosystems, the Nisqually National Wildlife Refuge and the Skagit Wild and Scenic River System, as well as local parks, playgrounds and fishing holes. Despite LWCF's being

funded with fees from offshore oil drilling — and not taxpayer dollars — Congress regularly raids LWCF, and spends those funds on other programs. This year, the U.S. House has proposed redirecting 80 percent of the funds that should go to LWCF. What will be your position on continued funding for LWCF?

— Legislation has stalled in Congress that would protect the existing public lands in the San Juan Islands as a national conservation area. The local community and visitors enjoy these islands in a variety of activities, including sea kayaking, cycling, fishing, hiking, boating and birding, and want to ensure they are protected from development for future generations to enjoy. Local businesses, elected officials, tourism organizations and Gov. Chris Gregoire have turned to the White House for action. Will you support these local efforts to protect 955 acres of existing public lands in the San Juan Islands as a national monument?

— The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has issued a Watershed Assessment for Bristol Bay in Alaska. Our companies and others in Washington have been vigorously supporting protections from proposed new mining in this world-class fishery and recreational destination. We firmly believe, based on the information in the EPA's Watershed Assessment, that mining activities in Bristol Bay present too great a risk to the watershed. If EPA follows up on its science to enact protections for Bristol Bay, will you support or oppose that action?

We urge congressional candidates to consider carefully and share a position on these and other public-lands issues. Fishing, hiking, bird-watching and other outdoor activities aren't hobbies — they are fuel for real jobs for real Washington residents, us included. Candidates should let the voters know where they stand; Washington's small businesses, economy and quality of life depend on it.

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