Seaplane
Pilots
Association

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December 5, 2001

Representative Jennifer Dunn
1501 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C., 20515

Dear Rep. Dunn:

I am writing to you on behalf of the 7,500 individual members of the Seaplane Pilots Association, including over 550 members in Washington State. Our members are frequent visitors to Lake Isabel, a spectacular mountain lake nestled into the ridges above Gold Bar and Index. It is our understanding that Senator Murray and Congressman Larsen are drafting a proposal that would incorporate Lake Isabel in a new wilderness area, a proposal that will likely need your blessing. This proposal is the reason for my letter.

Lake Isabel is a treasured destination for seaplane pilots. In addition to spectacular scenery and remarkable seclusion, Lake Isabel offers seaplane pilots a sandy beach ideal for our delicate floats. Members of our association frequently visit the lake during the summer months, enjoying family picnics, fishing, swimming, and general relaxation.

Most of Lake Isabel's shoreline is steep and rocky, littered with logs and brush, and forbidding to hikers. Only the easternmost tip of the lake offers a small sandy beach suitable for seaplanes and hikers. The latter are not frequently seen, as the hike is neither short nor easy.

We are not aware of any threat to the environmental quality of the area immediately surrounding the lake. Logging on the steep ridges around Lake Isabel is probably possible, but it is difficult to imagine that such an operation would be profitable or safe. During the months that seaplanes visit, we are the only motorized craft in the area. The seaplanes that come and go leave no trace, and in fact frequently pack out other's trash. Seaplanes have no prop in the water to stir up sediments or disturb aquatic plants. Neither do seaplanes port exhaust into the water or leave significant wakes. Noise is the only significant pollution from seaplanes, and there is rarely another soul within earshot to hear our comings and goings. Even if there were, on approach we're whisper quiet, and on departure we're up and gone in 30 seconds.

As you must know, designation of a wilderness area has the effect of closing public lands and waters to the vast majority of the public. Only those with the ability and desire to undertake a strenuous hike could enjoy Lake Isabel if it is designated a wilderness area. Most of our members are older, less endowed with time and physical prowess, and quite unlikely to undertake a hike to the lake. In the eyes of those people, Congress might as well sell the lake to a private party as designate it a wilderness.

Designating Lake Isabel a wilderness area would be acceptable if there was evidence that such a designation would arrest some indisputable threat to the quality of the environment around the lake. No such threat is known by us to exist, and hence we can find no reasonable justification for the closure of Lake Isabel to seaplanes. We have been told by Representative Larsen's office that the designation is needed to protect salmon breeding grounds and preserve the beautiful stretches of land in the area, but seaplanes have no adverse impact on either.

It is our understanding that Representative Larsen's office intends to draft the wilderness proposal with language that will allow seaplane operations to continue at Lake Isabel. Provided this language exists, we do not oppose the wilderness area proposal. However, we feel that your support is crucial to ensure that this language is preserved. We are up against environmental interests seeking the unconditional closure of the entire area to all mechanized access, regardless of whether such access is environmentally damaging or not.

Enclosed is a package of information that I hope will help you and/or your staff better understand seaplanes and our operations. If any questions arise, please do not hesitate to contact me. Another point of contact that you may find useful is John Sessions, past President of the Washington Seaplane Pilots Association, and a knowledgeable representative of seaplane pilots in the Puget Sound basin. His telephone number at work is (206) 587-4040.

Thank you for your time, and I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Michael Volk
President

Cc: Mr. John Sessions
Mr. Brandon Hall, Rep. Rick Larsen's Office