

## **Wilderness Week Celebrates WA Scenery, Greenery**

### **Local News**

Posted by: David Haviland

Posted on : September 24, 2010 at 5:21 am

Wilderness Week begins on Sunday, an annual reminder to enjoy America's most scenic spots - and to think about what it takes to protect them. Members of conservation groups from Washington State will be in a less tranquil setting: the nation's capitol. They're joining their counterparts from other states to update each other on wilderness legislation and to visit with members of Congress. With new wilderness areas proposed in 11 states, some are talking of combining them into another omnibus bill.

Doug Scott, policy director with the *Campaign for America's Wilderness*, says that's just one possibility.

"What we want to do is make sure that the individual areas that people are advocating for designation get strong support from their own congressional delegations, so that however the parliamentary mechanism in the Congress might unfold, their areas will be included."

Scott says polls and surveys have shown the National Wilderness Preservation System enjoys some of the widest support of any federal law since the system began in 1964. About 109 million acres nationwide are federally-protected wilderness - more than 4 million of them in Washington.

Gregg Bafundo, western Washington co-chair of the *Backcountry Hunters and Anglers*, says groups that care about wilderness are getting better at bringing all sides together at the start of a proposal, to forge compromises before they become problems.

"To be able to essentially do what Congress can't do right now, which is work together and bridge political gaps and socio-economic gaps, is powerful - and we're seeing progress."

In Washington, where 10 percent of the state is federally protected wilderness, Bafundo says it's easy to take wildlands for granted. He thinks setting aside one week a year is a valuable reminder of the reason Congress preserves such places.

"This week highlights the natural beauty and the areas that we have, not only in the Northwest, but across the nation. Having this opportunity for people to realize what's right outside their back door is extremely important."

In addition to the Alpine Lakes Wilderness expansion now in Congress, Bafundo says local groups are working on future proposals for wildlands on the Olympic Peninsula and in the Colville area.