

Washingtonians Celebrate National Public Lands Day

Local News

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - Saturday is National Public Lands Day. Just over 36 percent of Washington is public land, between federal and state acreage, but voters aren't hearing much about it so far in the run-up to the November elections.

Sportsmen's groups would like to change that, and a couple of them have reached out to the Washington congressional candidates to make sure they're aware of public land issues and see where they stand. Matt Scott, with Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, says their aim is strictly bipartisan.

"Regardless of election outcomes, we'd just like to sit down and talk about the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which is a good thing. It basically takes some of the revenues from offshore oil drilling and puts it back into conservation."

Outdoor enthusiasts are also nervous about the so-called Border Bill (HR 1505), says Scott, which passed the U.S. House this summer. It strips some environmental protections from lands within 100 miles of the U.S. borders with Canada and Mexico to give unrestricted access to Homeland Security.

Scott says Congress could learn some lessons from the Northeast Washington Forestry Coalition, a group that collaborates to help manage the Colville National Forest. He says it's been years since a timber sale there was challenged, because the stakeholders come to agreement on their own terms.

"Basically, it's industry and environmental organizations sitting at a table, working out some differences, getting a plan together that works for everybody - works for the community, has sustainable timber harvest in it, and also wilderness area."

Scott has been on both sides of the public lands debate, he says, as a former logger who is now an outfitter and guide. And rather than seeing groups continue to fight over the many uses of public lands, he thinks it's time for a different point of view.

"We are blessed in the West with an abundance of land. And when we look at these arguments in that light - instead of thinking like, 'We're losing it all' - if you come at it thinking that we have abundance, it really makes things better."

On Saturday at more than two dozen sites around the state, volunteers will help with trail-building and maintenance, trash pick-up and invasive plant removal, all in conjunction with state and federal agencies. Find a project near you online at publiclandsday.org.