

## Editorial

# National park expansion worth consideration

**T**he North Cascades are a crown jewel for Washington state, but the national park has yet to reach its potential.

The American Alps Legacy Proposal sets out to finish a job that began in the early 1960s — to protect and provide recreational access to some of the wildest and most pristine acreage in the nation. The proposal involves converting more than 238,000 acres of federal forest land to the national park system.

With only one road for access to enter the park, it's far enough off the beaten path to dissuade visitors from venturing there.

The proposal's goal is to make sure the pristine backcountry is protected from logging, mining and other industry while creating better recreational access in the front-country portion. The advantages include better public awareness of the natural treasures and an economic boost for areas leading to the park. The town of Concrete and all of the eastern Skagit County towns along Highway 20 would benefit from the extra traffic as more people aim for the North Cascades as a destination.

An economic impact study commissioned by the Alps Legacy group estimated as many as 1,000 jobs could be created.

Ironically, that same traffic is what concerned some Eastern Washington residents about the proposal. According to Alps Legacy coordinator Jim Davis, a major concern in the Methow Valley was that the park might become another Yellowstone. Some changes to the project's scope were made as a result of those concerns, but the primary objective remains.

The next step is congressional support, and then action.

Davis and other project activists have been pushing throughout Washington and with congressional members in the hope of garnering enough support to find a sponsor for legislation.

Davis said U.S. Sen. Maria Cantwell, D-Wash., is in talks with the group and may sponsor a bill. Some government bodies, such as the Snohomish County Council, have passed resolutions in favor of the project. Davis says the group would like the support of more local government officials, including those in Skagit County.

With the potential for an economic boost for the eastern portion of Skagit County and the possibility of added protection for natural resources, it seems very reasonable that our local officials and environmental groups should take a closer look at the project.

It isn't every day that economic and environmental benefits can go hand in hand. Add those factors to creating more recreational opportunities for families, and the proposal becomes even more attractive.

National parks are our nation's treasures. Taking the opportunity to expand this valuable resource is a project worth our attention.

■ Editorials reflect the consensus opinion of Publisher Heather Hernandez and Editor Colette Weeks. Signed columns reflect the author's viewpoint.