

## **Mount St. Helens Citizen's Task Force**

**April 24, 2008**

**Kelso, Washington**

**Statement of Sean Smith**

**NPCA Regional Director**

Committee Members. Sean Smith Northwest Regional Director for the National Parks Conservation Association. NPCA, is the largest and oldest conservation organization dedicated to the protection of our national park system.

As we all know, outdoor recreation is important to Washington's economy. According to Outdoor Industry Association (OIA), active recreation contributes \$11.7 billion annually to Washington's economy, supports nearly 115,000 jobs, generates \$650 million in annual sales tax revenue and provides sustainable growth for rural communities.

Obviously, a critical component of a high quality outdoor experience are well-maintained infrastructure, cutting edge facilities, and land management agencies with adequate management resources.

The Park Service's FY08 budget saw an increase of \$122 million to the operations budget. This money allowed the Park Service to hire as many as 3,000 new rangers, guides, and maintenance workers. The proposed FY09 budget already contains an additional \$161 million increase to operations. However, Senators across the country are recognizing the value national parks represent to their state's environment and economies and are seeking added park resources. Enclosed is a bipartisan letter from 34 Senators urging the Senate Appropriations committee to provide an even more significant increase to the Park Service FY09 budget.

Along with fiscal appropriations, legislation was recently introduced to provide a more sustained national park funding source. Senate bill 2817, the National Park Service Centennial Fund Act, co-sponsored by Senators Ken Salazar, Susan Collins, Max

Baucus, Norm Coleman, and Jon Tester, will create the Centennial Challenge Fund, a matching donation fund in the federal treasury that will provide up to \$100 million a year to the national parks in support of special "centennial projects." In the FY08 budget Congress allocated \$25 million to this project. Washington's national parks will see nearly \$400,000 in Centennial funding added to their base budgets. This money will be used to preserve backcountry facilities, increase youth access and appreciation of the outdoors, and attract new and diverse visitors to our national parks.