



Washington State Legislature

Honorable Senator Patty Murray
Honorable Senator Maria Cantwell
United States Senate

September 23, 2015

Dear Senators Murray and Cantwell:

We, the undersigned legislators from both the Washington State Senate and the Washington State House of Representatives, and representing both Democrats and Republicans, urge you to right a wrong by helping to resolve an egregious name issue on our federal lands.

In 2007 and 2008, the Washington State Board on Geographic Names voted unanimously to change the name of Coon Lake, a 15-acre lake located in the Stehekin Valley of the North Cascade mountain range, to Howard Lake. The state board acted to honor Wilson Howard, a Black prospector who staked mining claims around the lake 125 years ago.

In enacting the name change, the board recognized Howard's direct and historically significant contribution to the area, and removed any possibility that the former name represented a racial slur. The board also changed the name of the associated creek to Howard Creek. The name changes were advocated by a range of citizens, local residents and property owners, along with the Chelan County Board of Commissioners and the Chelan County Sheriff. Today our state recognizes Howard Lake as the lake's proper name in its maps and official records.

We are very disappointed to learn that the federal government has to date refused to ratify the state's decision – normally a pro-forma matter. Howard Lake lies within the Lake Chelan National Recreation Area, which is administered by the National Park Service (NPS). Since 2007, the NPS has steadfastly opposed the change from Coon Lake to Howard Lake, and has effectively blocked action within the U.S. Department of the Interior.

Today the NPS trail signs and maps in the North Cascades National Park point to "Coon Lake." In continuing to oppose the name change, the Park Service is failing to recognize Mr. Howard's historical contribution to the area and is perpetuating a geographic name that is widely seen as pejorative given its specific origin in this case.

[The Sept. 10 article in Crosscut.com, "Racism and the public lands: the case of Coon Lake,"](#) describes in more detail the issues at stake in this situation. You may also refer to a story that aired on [KUOW](#) on the same topic.

This is particularly timely in the wake of the Obama administration's decision to change the name of Alaska's Mt. McKinley to Denali, to honor that state's native people.

We urge you to work with the administration and your colleagues to right this wrong, and align the federal government with Washington state's decision to change the name of Coon Lake, and make our national parks welcoming to all people.

Very truly yours,

Members of the Washington State Legislature

Copies to:

Representative Susan DelBene
Representative Rick Larsen
Representative Jaime Herrera Beutler
Representative Dan Newhouse
Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Representative Derek Kilmer
Representative Jim McDermott
Representative Dave Reichert
Representative Adam Smith
Representative Denny Heck



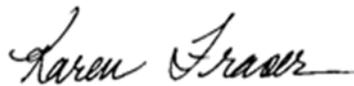
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1st Legislative District



Senator Bob Hasegawa (D)
11th Legislative District



Senator Marko Liias
21st Legislative District (D)



Senator Karen Fraser (D)
22nd Legislative District



Senator Christine Rolfes (D)
23rd Legislative District



Senator Jeannie Darneille (D)
27th Legislative District



Senator Steve Conway (D)
29th Legislative District



Senator Pam Roach (R)
31st Legislative District



Senator Jeanne Kohl-Welles (D)
36th Legislative District



Senator Pramila Jayapal (D)
37th Legislative District



Senator John McCoy (D)
38th Legislative District



Senator Kevin Ranker (D)
40th Legislative District



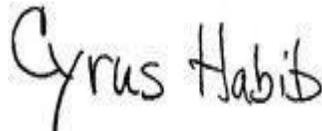
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44th Legislative District



Senator Jamie Pedersen (D)
43rd Legislative Pedersen



Senator David Frockt (D)
46th Legislative District



Senator Cyrus Habib (D)
48th Legislative District



Senator Annette Cleveland (D)
49th Legislative District



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1st Legislative District



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1st Legislative District



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21st Legislative District



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21st Legislative District



Representative Chris Reykdal (D)
22nd Legislative District



Representative Drew Hansen (D)
23rd Legislative District



Representative Sherry Appleton (D)
23rd Legislative District



Representative Jack Fey (D)
27th Legislative District



Representative Laurie Jenkins (D)
27th Legislative District



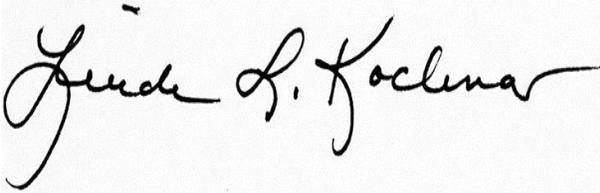
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28th Legislative District



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29th Legislative District



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30th Legislative District



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31st Legislative District



Representative Ruth Kagi (D)
32nd Legislative District



Representative Tina Orwall (D)
33rd Legislative District



Representative Cindy Ryu (D)
32nd Legislative District



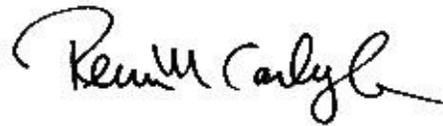
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