

State of
Washington
House of
Representatives



Wednesday, March 09, 2011

Phil Anderson, Director, Washington Department of Wildlife
600 Capitol Way N.
Olympia, WA 98501

Subject: Recreational Rock Collecting on State Public Lands

Director Anderson,

It has been brought to my attention by some of my constituents that recreational rock collecting on Lands managed by your departments is prohibited.

At first I was astounded by this allegation, but research has shown this to be true. WAC 232-12-251 (WDFW) and WAC 332-52-114 (WDNR), regulations promulgated by the departments, clearly prohibit this recreational activity.

Further, my research has found no justification or rationalization for this prohibition. On the other hand, the Federal Bureau of Land Management (BLM) not only allows recreational rock collecting on land it manages in Washington (and Oregon), it provides for a 'reasonable amount' as defined as 250 lbs per person per day (ref: BLM Rock Collecting Guide for Oregon and Washington).

We're not referring to valuable rock - virtually without exception, rocks in Washington of interest to rock hounds and flintknappers have no commercial value. In fact, until the rocks are cut, ground, polished, knapped or otherwise transformed, they have no value other than as a rock. Even after all the work to transform them into something appealing, most rock from Washington only has value to those that do the work of capping or flintknapping.

My research, supported by input from rock hounds, including the Washington State Mineral Council (affiliation of over 50 rock clubs in the state), and flintknappers of the Puget Sound Knappers Association, also leads me to believe that recreational rock collecting serves the general public as a whole. Rock Hounds, Flintknappers, and amateur geologists, are frequently involved in community events. Hardly a week goes by in which a Washington rock club somewhere doesn't have a public show and demonstration. The Puget Sound Flintknappers host a half dozen major 'knap-ins' throughout the year, all of which are open to the public. Both the rock hounds and flintknappers frequently demonstrate at schools, to boy scouts, senior citizen groups, and other community organization. They provide valuable educational services to these communities on the State's geology, anthropology, history and culture via their hobby and the rocks they collect.

In taking a closer look at these two communities I've learned several things. First, to a large degree they're members tend to be older – many are senior citizens. Many are also what might be referred to as 'economically challenged'. Both groups see outdoor recreation as one of the few affordable activities left still available to them. They are also some of the most environmentally responsible people that visit our public recreational lands.

Not only do these rock collecting groups benefit the public as a whole, but they have the potential to be of significant benefit to both the WDFW and WDNR. As responsible citizens, they can provide the departments with vast public support and enforcement assistance. In these times of budget cuts and corresponding reductions in staff, I would think that public support would be a tremendous asset to both departments.

On the other hand – this prohibition on rock collecting, as well as the recent proposals by the WDFW (CR-101 and CR-102) seeking greater enforcement and stiffer penalties, is having just the opposite effect. Public support for the WDFW and WDNR is diminishing – significantly I might add, from the emails, phone calls and visits I've been getting. My constituents who are members of these rock clubs/flintknapping associations are determined to effect a change, one way or another.

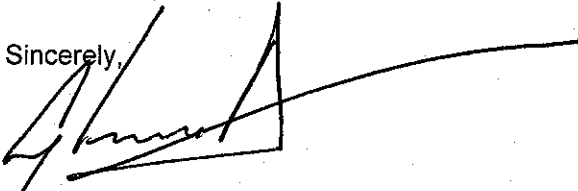
The state legislature has been receiving and can expect to receive many, many more email, letters, phone calls and visits from the organizations. The bad publicity they will generate via the internet, forums, blogs, Twitter, Facebook, emails, etc, have the potential, like never before, of creating a public relations nightmare for both the WDFW and WDNR.

They would much rather work with the departments to draft appropriate guidelines (along the lines of the BLM) for recreational rock collecting. Should that not be possible, they plan to propose a change to the legislation and are actively seeking sponsors – of which I have no doubt they will find. They have members with WDFW and WDNR experience, including experience drafting legislation. And they are well organized, technologically sophisticated and highly motivated.

Personally, I would like to see this resolved in such a way that will be mutually beneficial to the departments, the State and the recreational rock collectors – without the need for legislative action and certainly without the inevitable firestorm of bad publicity. Neither the WDFW nor the WDNR can afford it.

Professionally, I do not believe the legislature sees, or has ever seen, enforcement of a prohibition on recreational rock collecting as a worthwhile expenditure of State funds by either department. While there may be future need for changes in the enforcement policies of the departments, the relative importance of these changes will no doubt be substantially diminished in the light of this issue.

Sincerely,



Glenn Anderson,
State Representative, 5th Legislative District

cc: Peter Goldmark, Commissioner of Public Lands; WDFW Commission