



Bipartisan Praise for Gregoire

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She's taken a battering on the airwaves of late, but Gov. Chris Gregoire basked in bipartisan praise from two former governors - one Republican, the other Democrat - at the annual breakfast of the Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition.

Ex-Govs. Dan Evans and Mike Lowry, who faced off 25 years ago in a special U.S. Senate election, have teamed up for nearly two decades to lobby money to buy up endangered wildlife habitat and recreation lands around the state.

Gregoire was present at the coalition's creation in 1988, in the job she then held as director of the Department of Ecology.

"She was a young hardworking advocate," said Evans, a Republican, governor from 1965 to 1977.

"In a tough job," added Lowry, who served one term during the 1990's.

"She did all the work," Evans went on. "We're darned proud."

He brought on Gregoire, who received a standing ovation.

In turn, Gregoire gave a glowing endorsement of the coalition's work. "It is a commitment we must sustain well into the future of the state of Washington," the governor said.

Gregoire signed the largest-even appropriation, \$100 million, to support the land acquisition program.

Leveraging state dollars, federal matching funds, and money from 135 public and private groups, Evans, Lowry and the coalition have raised more than \$1 billion and used the money to preserve more than 300,000 acres of land -- an area larger than Mount Rainier National Park.

The breakfast on Tuesday brought together adversaries old and new. Evans and Lowry were at the dais, of course. Another speaker was State Lands Commissioner Doug Sutherland, who beat Lowry in 2000 to become overseer of more than 3 million acres of state forest land.

"We wouldn't be able to protect these places were this program not in place," said Sutherland.

The commissioner noted that farms, forests and estuaries have been protected "in perpetuity."

"Perpetuity, that's a long time," said Sutherland.

Democrats are working to see that Sutherland doesn't serve in perpetuity.

He ranks just behind Gregoire as Washington's most endangered statewide officeholder. The Republican incumbent is being pressed by Okanogan County rancher (and longtime Washington State University regent) Peter Goldmark. Sutherland took barely over 51 percent of the vote in the August primary.

Goldmark, too, was on hand at the breakfast, working a crowd that included some of his leading supporters.

The Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition was founded by Elliott Marks, an aide who worked conservation issues for Evans when he was governor and went on to be state director of The Nature Conservancy.

Its spectrum of corporate supporters has ranged from Recreational Equipment to Puget Sound Energy, to the Rocky Mountain Elk Foundation to Realtors' statewide association.

Especially in fast-growing Puget Sound lowlands, it has succeeded in preserving farmland, wildlife corridors and estuaries. Numerous blue herons owe their estuary habitat to its efforts.

As well, the coalition reflects back to a time when conservation was a bipartisan cause in the Evergreen State.

A Republican governor, Evans, joined with Democratic state Sen. Martin Durkan nearly 40 years ago to secure passage of the state's basic environmental laws, and create the Department of Ecology.

The perpetually ruffled chief-of-staff in Durkan's office was Mike Lowry.