Statement of Congressman Norm Dicks
During House Floor Consideration of H.R. 1162
February 6, 2012

I rise to urge passage of HR 1162, the Quileute Tribe tsunami and flood protection bill. I also want to thank the House Natural Resources Committee for its work in shepherding this bill to the Floor today.

The Quileutes are one of eight Tribes living in the Washington State District that I represent here in Congress. Although the Tribe's reservation at La Push is spectacularly beautiful, it also is a dangerous place to live. The threat of tsunamis is a harsh reality that the Quileute Tribe faces every day. The Tribe lives on a one-square mile reservation along the Pacific coast of the Olympic Peninsula. And again, I cannot emphasize enough the breathtaking nature of their home. The Tribe has received much notice over the last few years due to the Twilight series of movies and novels. If you are not familiar with the Twilight phenomenon yourself, then I am sure that at least your children or grandchildren know about the Quileutes and their role in the Twilight world.

HR 1162 will provide land currently in Olympic National Park to the Quileute Tribe to enable the re-location of many facilities outside the tsunami zone. We need only look to the tragedy last year in Japan to see the loss of human life and horrific damage that tsunamis can cause.

Much of the Quileute's infrastructure, including a day care center, the elder center, government offices and Quileute Tribal members' homes are right in the path of a potential tsunami. This existential threat is compounded by damaging floods from the Quillayute River nearly every year.

The purpose of HR 1162 is to help the Quileutes move their people and buildings to safer land. The Olympic National Park would transfer land that is out of the tsunami zone to the Tribe for the development of new infrastructure. Of the 275 acres the Park Service would provide the Tribe for this safety purpose, 222 are currently designated as "Wilderness." The legislation would de-designate those 222 acres.

The legislation also settles a long-standing dispute between the Olympic National Park and the Tribe over the northern boundary of the Reservation. The resolution of this dispute benefits the Tribe, the Park Service and the general public. The Park would provide 510 acres to the Tribe to settle the dispute.

The bill would place into Trust these two parcels as well as another piece of non-Federal land the Tribe had acquired earlier. The bill also guarantees access for the public to some of the most beautiful Washington State beaches.

I must note, however, that I am disappointed that a provision of HR 1162 was stripped from the bill when the full Natural Resources Committee passed it last October. The legislation as introduced mitigated the loss of Wilderness designation for the 222 acres to be given to the Tribe by designating other parcels already within Olympic National Park as Wilderness. It was this provision designating new Wilderness within the Park that was removed. In response, I have introduced HR 3222 that would designate as Wilderness those acres stripped from the underlying bill. The National Parks, Forests and Public Lands Subcommittee held a hearing on HR 3222 and other bills back in December and I urge the Committee to keep making progress on HR 3222.

In closing, I want to recognize the Quileute Tribe, its Council, and Tribal chairs past and present, along with National Park Service Director Jon Jarvis and Olympic National Park Superintendent Karen Gustin for their hard work over many years to resolve this dispute and provide safer land for the Tribe.

I want to thank Doc Hastings, the Chairman of the Natural Resources Committee and Todd Young and Todd Ungerecht of his staff. I want to thank National Parks, Forest and Public Lands Subcommittee Chairman Rob Bishop and Jim Streeter of his staff. On the Democratic side, I want to thank Ranking Members Ed Markey and Raul Grijalva and their staffers Jeff Duncan and David Watkins.

In closing, I urge the House to pass today HR 1162 to provide the Quileute Tribe a safer home along the Pacific Coast in Washington State.