



# **DIOGO MAGALHAES**

FOR ISSAQUAH CITY COUNCIL

## **CAMPAIGN POSITION ON THE SENATE COMMITTEE ON ENERGY & NATURAL RESOURCES' BUDGET RECONCILIATION BILL**

**JUNE 24, 2025**

### **Protecting Our Public Lands While Addressing Housing Affordability**

#### **A False Premise to a Real Crisis**

The Senate Committee on Energy & Natural Resources' budget reconciliation bill proposes mandating the sale of up to 3 million acres of Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management lands across 11 Western states—including hiking trails and critical wildlife corridors. This massive public land sell-off is being advocated as a housing solution, but it fundamentally misunderstands both our housing crisis and the irreplaceable value of our public lands.

The premise that solving our housing crisis requires sacrificing public lands is fundamentally flawed and creates a false dichotomy. We can and must address housing affordability without dismantling the public land system that belongs to all Americans.

This legislation threatens irreversible damage to our nation's natural heritage. For Washington State residents, the stakes are particularly high: of the 250 million acres eligible for potential sale, over 5 million are located right here in Washington—lands that serve our communities in King County. These are the forests, trails, and natural areas that define our region's character and provide irreplaceable recreational, ecological, and economic benefits. We cannot allow short-sighted policy to permanently sacrifice our shared natural inheritance for a misguided approach to housing policy.

#### **Housing Crisis: A Two-Tiered Challenge**

Our housing crisis operates on two interconnected levels. First, housing development faces a nationwide deficit of over 4 million homes. Second, housing affordability presents an even starker challenge: the U.S. lacks more than 7 million rental homes that are both affordable and available to extremely low-income renters.

This housing shortage stems from deeper structural issues that selling public lands alone cannot address. Effective, sustainable, and inclusive housing solutions require thoughtful zoning reform, transit-oriented development, and strategic use of already-developed or suitable private lands.

Most critically, we must address one of the root causes of our housing crisis: income inequality and wage stagnation. Working families increasingly cannot afford homeownership, while our region's concentration of wealth creates exclusive communities that push these families farther from economic centers and opportunities.

While proponents claim land sales will "unlock" housing development, no guarantee exists that these sales will address actual housing needs or create truly affordable housing. More concerning, the bill's restrictive covenant on housing development lasts only 10 years—a dangerously short timeframe that creates economic incentives for commercial speculation and conversion to other uses.

### **Our Public Lands: Irreplaceable Community Assets**

Community surveys consistently demonstrate that public lands and spaces are fundamental to life in Issaquah and across the Pacific Northwest. These lands define our region's identity, support critical ecosystems, and provide essential services that sustain our communities. From recreation and wildlife habitat to climate resilience and the natural spaces that nurture both physical and mental health, public lands are woven into the fabric of Pacific Northwest life.

This legislation would open over 250 million acres of public land to potential sale—an area encompassing local recreation sites, wilderness study areas, roadless conservation zones, and essential wildlife habitat and migration corridors. Though national parks and monuments remain protected, the breadth of vulnerable lands represents an unprecedented and permanent shift in how we steward our shared natural heritage.

Beyond the immediate environmental and economic impacts, this proposal diminishes our environmental commons for future generations and squanders an inheritance that we hold in trust, not in ownership. We are stewards of these lands, not their masters, and selling them represents a profound disservice to intergenerational justice—depriving our children and grandchildren of the natural legacy that has sustained communities for generations.

### **A Better Path Forward**

Addressing housing shortages and achieving true affordability requires more than conventional development—it demands rethinking zoning policies, maximizing the potential of existing private and commercial land, and tackling the root causes of economic inequality that price out working families. A comprehensive approach must address wage stagnation, wealth concentration, and systemic barriers while creating sustainable communities that serve residents rather than outside interests.

- **Economic Justice First:** Advocate for living wages that keep pace with housing costs, support local job creation in high-opportunity areas, and implement policies that enhance purchasing power. Rather than lowering housing standards or privatizing public assets, we must strengthen workers' economic foundation to access housing dignity.
- **Comprehensive Family Support:** Reduce the financial pressures that make housing unaffordable by addressing other major household expenses. Establish affordable community daycare centers, expand healthcare access, and create support systems that free up family resources for stable housing.
- **Sustainable Development:** Prioritize development that balances investor returns with community benefit and intergenerational equity. Ensure market forces serve neighborhood needs through community benefit agreements, inclusionary zoning requirements, and development standards that create lasting value for residents.

- **Strategic Land Use Reform:** Implement zoning changes that enable transit-oriented development, mixed-income housing, and walkable neighborhoods. Transform underutilized commercial corridors into vibrant residential communities while preserving neighborhood character and preventing displacement.
- **Community-Centered Planning:** Engage residents as equal partners in development decisions, prioritize anti-displacement protections, and ensure new housing strengthens rather than fragments existing communities.

### **Protecting Democratic Process**

The bill requires minimal consultation with local governments, governors, and Tribes, but provides no opportunity for meaningful public input. This top-down approach ignores the voices of communities who will be most affected by these irreversible decisions.

### **My Position**

I oppose this mandatory disposal of public lands in its current form. This approach creates irreparable harm to our community while failing to meaningfully address the housing challenges we face.

If public land sales are ever considered—and they should be an absolute last resort—any restrictive covenants must extend for 100 years, not merely 10. This extended timeline removes economic incentives for commercial speculation and ensures lasting community benefit rather than short-term profit-taking.

We must balance our urgent housing needs with sustainable growth and responsible stewardship of our irreplaceable public lands. True housing affordability comes from strengthening families' economic capacity and expanding housing choices through fair wages and economic opportunities—not from compromising our environmental heritage and vital community assets.

### **Diogo Magalhaes**

Running for Issaquah City Council