

Oregon senators push for expansion of the Smith River Rec Area

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Oregon Senators Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden have introduced legislation to expand the Smith River National Recreation Area into Oregon by 58,000 acres.

In a press release, the senators said the move would protect the rivers, streams and adjacent lands of the North Fork Smith River watershed, plus boost local fishing and recreation industries.

In 1990, Congress enacted legislation to establish the Smith River National Recreation Area in Del Norte County, California to protect the watershed. But its boundary stopped at the Oregon border, leaving the North Fork of the Smith River and its tributaries unprotected.

Merkley said. "I'm grateful to have had the opportunity to work with local leaders, conservationists and businesses to create legislation expanding the Smith River National Recreation Area."

"Smith River is not only home to critical salmon and steelhead habitat, it also provides clean drinking water to families along the south coast," Wyden said.

“Add to the fact that this legislation also allows the Forest Service to continue its work preventing and fighting wildfires, and this adds up to a significant win for these communities.”

The Smith River is home to coho and Chinook salmon, coastal cutthroat trout, Siskiyou Mountains forests, and redwood trees that tower over lower river banks.

The recreation area’s expansion would permanently withdraw the land from new mining claims, said the two senators, buffering the area from proposed nickel strip mines, and protect 74 miles of scenic rivers, including Baldface Creek, Chrome Creek and nearby streams.

In addition, the legislation would require the Forest Service to prepare an updated recreation plan for the entire National Recreation Area, and produce a study of streams, fens, wetlands, and potentially unstable and vulnerable aquatic habitat areas.

The bill complements the Southwestern Oregon Watershed and Salmon Protection Act, which was introduced by the senators earlier this year to protect the North Fork Smith River watershed and other southwestern Oregon rivers and streams.

“The Kalmiopsis Wilderness and Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest are recognized as the most diverse, wild, unique, rugged and beautiful landscapes in North America,” Curry County Commissioner Court Boice said.

“This legislation will certainly help, and is important for maintaining our pristine rivers and recovering the vibrancy of our salmon and steelhead runs.”

“The Smith River is an important watershed in southern Oregon and northern California, providing critical salmonid habitat, drinking water and recreational opportunities. I will continue to be a strong state partner in supporting the Smith River, its tributaries and the watersheds of southwest Oregon,” said Oregon House Rep. David Brock Smith (R-Port Orford).