

Senators introduce legislation to Include Oregon in Smith River National Recreation Area

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Oregon's U.S. Senators Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden today introduced legislation to expand the Smith River National Recreation Area by 58,000 acres, a move that would protect the diverse ecosystems of the rivers, streams, and adjacent lands of the North Fork Smith River watershed and help boost the local fishing and recreation industries that many Oregon families rely on. The legislation is also cosponsored by U.S. Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and Alex Padilla (D-CA).

In 1990, Congress enacted legislation to establish the Smith River National Recreation Area (NRA) to protect the watershed, but the boundary of the NRA stopped at the Oregon border, leaving the North Fork of the Smith River and its tributaries unprotected.

"When we come together to protect our state's natural wonders, we can create jobs, protect resources, grow our economy, and make sure future generations of Oregonians can enjoy our incredible public lands," Merkley said. "I'm grateful to have had the partnership of local leaders, conservationists, and businesses as

well as my colleagues in creating this legislation expanding the Smith River National Recreation Area—a commonsense win-win for adventurers across the Northwest, those interested in preserving the beautiful places in Oregon, and Southern Oregon’s economy.”

“This legislation has deservedly earned solid bipartisan support in our state, and I’m all in to team up with Senator Merkley on getting this key bill across the finish line for Southern Oregon,” Wyden said.

“Expanding this crucial recreation area would add up to a huge win that protects our state’s natural treasures, generates recreation jobs and invests in our local economies for future generations.”

The Smith River is home to a rich variety of plants and wildlife—including Coho and Chinook salmon, Coastal Cutthroat trout, the diverse Siskiyou Mountains forests, unique plants found nowhere else on earth, and spectacular redwoods that tower over the lower river banks. The Smith River NRA’s scenic beauty, world-class fisheries, and exceptional water quality attract adventurers who partake in water sports, fishing, hunting, camping, and sightseeing.

The NRA expansion would permanently withdraw the land from new mining claims, helping to protect this sensitive 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 task the Forest Service with the preparation of an updated recreation plan identifying specific plans for the entire National Recreation Area, and produce a special study of streams, fens, wetlands, and potentially unstable and vulnerable aquatic habitat areas. The bill complements the Oregon Recreation Enhancement Act and Southwestern Oregon Watershed and Salmon Protection Act, which was introduced by the Senators last Congress to protect the North Fork Smith River watershed and other Southwestern Oregon rivers and streams.

“I am happy to offer strong support for Senator Merkley’s work to expand our beautiful Smith River Watershed as part of our fabulous Wild Rivers Coast,” said Court Boice, Curry County Commissioner. “The Kalmiopsis Wilderness and Rogue River – Siskiyou National Forest are recognized as the most diverse, wild, unique, rugged and beautiful Landscapes in North America. This legislation will certainly help and is important for maintaining our pristine rivers and recovering the vibrancy of our salmon and steelhead runs.”

“I thank Senator Merkley and support his efforts and legislation to expand the Smith River National Recreation Area in Oregon’s North Fork of the Smith River watershed,” said David Brock Smith, Oregon State Senator District 01 (R-Port Orford). “The Smith River is an important watershed in Southern Oregon and Northern California, providing critical salmonid habitat, drinking water and recreational opportunities, and I will continue to be a strong state partner in supporting the Smith River, its tributaries and the watersheds of Southwest Oregon.”

“Expanding the Smith River National Recreation Area and protecting the North Fork lands in Oregon is absolutely the right thing to do,” said Susan Jane Brown, Senior Staff Attorney, Western Environmental Law Center. “I’m grateful for Senator Merkley’s leadership and for the cooperation by many interests to advance this critically important legislation for one of our nation’s most spectacular wild rivers.”

“The Oregon Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers continues to stand with the sportsmen and women of Oregon for the protection of the wild lands and waters of the State,” said Justin Gindlesperger, SW Regional Director Oregon Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers. “The expansion of the Smith River National Recreation Area establishes an essential safeguard to the watershed of the Smith River so future generations can experience a remarkable and truly wild landscape here in Southern Oregon. We appreciate and fully support the effort to protect such a valuable resource.”

“I’ve paddled the North Fork of the Smith in Oregon as well as Baldface Creek and can attest to their distinct values,” said Zach Collier, Owner/Outfitter, Northwest Rafting Company. “We fully support any legislation that promotes the permanent protection of these rivers. The North Fork watershed is uniquely special to the world and should be protected as such.”