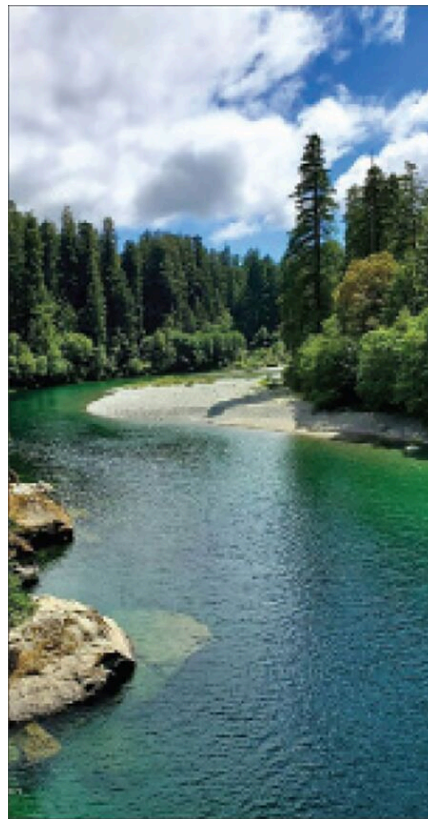


Merkley, Wyden: Smith River National Recreation Area expansion into Oregon clears key hurdle

August 1, 2022



Oregon's U.S. Senators Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden recently announced the Smith River National Recreation Area Expansion Act (Smith River NRA), legislation to expand the Smith River NRA, cleared a key hurdle by passing out of a Senate committee on a bipartisan vote. Expanding the Smith River NRA by 58,000 acres into Oregon 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 Oregonians rely on.

"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. "Expanding the Smith River National Recreation Area is a commonsense win-win-win for our economy, adventurers across the Northwest, and those dedicated to preserving the ecosystems that

make Oregon so special. I'm grateful to all of the local leaders, conservationists, and businesses who have been a part of this process so far, and I look forward to continuing to work together to get this bill signed into law."

"Our legislation has strong bipartisan support at home, and I'm proud to have shepherded this important legislation, on which Senator Merkley and I partnered, through the Committee today," Wyden said. "The Smith River watershed is home to an incredibly rich array of life and offers exceptional recreational activities. By expanding the Smith River Recreation Area, this bill will protect our state's natural treasures, generate recreation jobs and invest in our local economies for years to come."

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

The Smith River NRA expansion would permanently withdraw the land from new mining claims, helping to protect this sensitive area from proposed nickel strip mines, and protect 75 miles of scenic rivers, including Baldface Creek, Chrome Creek, and nearby streams. Additionally, 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 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.

"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 House Representative HD 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, Wildlands Program Director with the 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 of 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."

"The Wild Rivers Coast and rivers like the Smith are legendary among anglers for their steelhead and salmon fisheries," said Dean Finnerty, NW Regional Director, Angler's Conservation Project, Trout Unlimited. "This region supports a robust sport fishing economy that is vitally important for many rural communities. Sen. Merkley's bi-partisan Smith River Recreation Area Additions Act is a sensible and timely way to honor the sporting heritage of this region and to conserve the cold, clean, fish-filled waters that are the hallmark of this part of America."

"The Smith River deserves complete protection because state lines are arbitrary to a river," said Will Volpert, Indigo Creek Outfitters. "Oregon is lucky to have a piece of the Smith, as it is truly one of the most majestic and beautiful river systems anywhere. It is a place like no other—with canyon colors beyond vibrant and a terrain that begs to be explored yet is rugged enough to hold most adventurers back. Every time I visit the Smith, it feels like I'm the first person to visit the river canyon in all of history—and that's a pretty special feeling."

"Oregon's North Fork Smith watershed is a botanical treasure and should have always been a part of the Smith River National Recreation Area," said Joseph Vaile, Climate Director of the Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center. "We thank Senator Merkley for introducing this legislation that will also designate many of the North Fork Smith River's cold-water tributaries as Wild & Scenic. Anyone who has had a chance to explore the remote, primitive backcountry of Oregon's North Fork Smith headwaters knows that it is one of the most spectacular rivers in the world."

"The upper reaches of the Smith River watershed provide exceptional and unique opportunities for backcountry recreation," said Thomas O'Keefe, the Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director for American Whitewater. "We appreciate the leadership of Senator Merkley to expand the Smith River National Recreation Area to include the headwaters in Oregon. The area is characterized by rare hydrologic and botanical resources that the legislation appropriately recognizes. The extension of Wild and Scenic designation to the tributaries of the North Fork Smith will further protect one of the west coast's last free-flowing rivers and a special place for all who enjoy wild rivers."

"We have been working to protect the North Fork Smith River's wild headwaters—keeping its water pristine, protecting fish species' habitats, and ensuring clean drinking water and outdoor recreation for local communities," said Alyssa Babin, founder of Wild and Scenic Rivers in Brookings, Oregon. "We thank Senator Merkley for his leadership in introducing this bill, and his partnership in working to protect this important watershed."

"The North Fork Smith is a national treasure, and it always should have been a part of the Smith River National Recreation Area," said Michael Dotson, executive director of the Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands

Center. "We are thankful to Senator Merkley for his leadership in protecting one of the most spectacular rivers in the world."

"The expansion of the Smith River National Recreation Area completes a conservation effort initiated over thirty years ago," said Grant Werschull, Co-Executive Director for Smith River Alliance. "This action is vitally important to downstream communities and the Smith River as a stronghold for Pacific salmon species."

"The Smith River is recognized as one of the premier salmon strongholds on the West Coast," said Guido Rahr, President and CEO of the Wild Salmon Center. "We're grateful to Senators Merkley and Wyden for this investment in wild salmon and the coastal communities that depend on them. Protecting the Smith's cold, clean flows across the entire watershed will secure this place for people and fish for generations to come."

"Senator Merkley's pathbreaking legislation has the potential to conserve Oregon's portion of the incomparable Smith River watershed in Southwest Oregon for this and future generations," said Andy Kerr with The Larch Company. "We hope that Congress promptly considers and passes the bill into law."