

# **Committee on Resources**

## **Subcommittee on National Parks & Public Lands**

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### **Witness Statement**

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**Testimony of Kevin Smith**  
**on behalf of Governor John A. Kitzhaber, M.D.**  
**On H.R.4828- The Steens Mountain Wilderness Act of 2000**  
**Before Subcommittee on National Parks and Public Lands**  
**House Resources Committee**  
**July 18, 2000**

Thank you Mr. Chairman for holding this hearing on H.R. 4828 - the Steens Mountain Wilderness Act of 2000. My name is Kevin Smith and I am the director of Governor John Kitzhaber's Washington, D.C. office. I would like to share with you Governor Kitzhaber's thoughts on the legislation before you.

The Governor believes it is important and necessary to get meaningful public input and review of this legislation. He would like to especially thank Representative Walden for his - and his staff's - tireless and committed effort to working in bipartisan partnership with the Oregon delegation, the Secretary of Interior and himself to develop the principles and concepts contained within this legislation.

The Steens Mountain Area is a jewel. Its beauty and ecological value are immense. The Steens-Alvord area is home to multiple rare species, scientifically important landscapes and geologic formations and outstanding recreational and scenic values. It is an Oregon jewel and it is a national treasure. It is our duty to conserve and protect it for generations to come.

The Steens Mountain Area is also home to a rich and valuable Oregon culture. From the ancestors of the Burns Paiute Native American tribe to the family ranches of today, the Steens-Alvord area has cultural, historical, and economic value. We must not lose this value. We must diligently safeguard the existing culture and way of life on the mountain, for if we do not we will surely diminish all the critical values of the mountain - its ecology, its culture, and its people.

Governor Kitzhaber's goal is to keep the Steens Mountain Area the way it is now - to protect its ecological, social and economic integrity. He believes the single greatest threat to the mountain is unwise development. We must craft legislation that prevents the establishment of developments that diminish the culture and ecology of the area. Trophy homes, resorts and commercial developments have no place on the mountain. The Governor supports the concepts contained within this legislation that provide incentives to provide long-term conservation of the lands for both sound ecological benefit and agricultural use. The use of conservation easements, ecologically sound grazing permits and like-value land exchanges are the tools we need to protect the Steens-Alvord area.

The Governor supports the establishment of new wilderness units on the mountain and keeping the remaining Wilderness Study Areas. The land exchanges are critical not only to establish this new wilderness, a large part of which will be cow-free, but to promoting sound ecological uses of the land and

an economic foundation of the area which will reduce the incentive for unwise, environmentally damaging development.

It is imperative to the success of this legislation and the success of this effort that the land exchanges occur. As important as these land exchanges are, though, the land exchanges must be fair and reasonable for all parties - the taxpayers of the United States and the private landowners. The purpose of the land exchanges must be to create areas of critical ecological protection and provide means of keeping the ranching operations viable. The land exchanges must be both in the public interest and fair to the landowners. We should acknowledge that many important public values cannot have a monetary value placed on them, yet these values must be part of the equation in determining what constitutes a fair land exchange. Accomplishing these purposes will help maintain the character and splendor of the Steens.

Governor Kitzhaber believes that wise ranching practices can be compatible with sound ecological protection. This legislation provides mechanisms for cooperative management of the area to successfully achieve the dual goals of maintaining the historic culture and economy of the area and protecting the valuable watersheds, vegetation and wildlife resident on the mountain. The Governor believes we should acknowledge - especially in the case of public lands -- that if we do not conserve and protect the ecological values of the area we could jeopardize the overall health of these watersheds. Moreover, in the case of the private lands, we should provide cooperative efforts that incent sound conservation practices and uses.

The Governor has worked with the Secretary and the Oregon delegation to develop a comprehensive, balanced approach to conserving and protecting the Steens-Alvord area. He believes H.R. 4828 represents a good example of give-and-take and a focus on achieving legislation that is balanced and fair. Other critical components of the legislation, which are necessary to the whole are the provisions for mineral withdrawal; the designation of the Wild and Scenic Rivers; the Redband Trout Reserve; the development of a comprehensive transportation plan which addresses maintenance, improvement, private access and closure of roads; use of non-mechanized means before mechanized means for treatment of juniper for ecological purposes; the \$25 million authorization for acquisition of land and interests in land; and, creation of a citizens' advisory council and independent science team. Governor Kitzhaber would ask the committee to pay careful attention to establishment of water developments. Any water developments in wilderness units must adhere to the established guidelines of the Wilderness Act and be only used for and designed to improve the ecological health of the area.

Finally, the Governor would like to say that he supports the concepts contained within this legislation and believes it is important that Congress pass sound, balanced legislation soon. There will no doubt be revisions that the Committee will consider and he would be happy to work with you in addressing concerns that may be expressed by members of the public.

The Governor's position with regard to Steens remains consistent. If we cannot achieve legislation that provides for long-term protection of the area free of unwise development, he will support a national monument designation. The Governor believes this legislation goes a long way toward achieving his purpose and will be happy to work with all parties for any improvements that are needed.

Mr. Chairman, once again, on behalf of Governor Kitzhaber, thank you for holding this hearing and we look forward to working with you.

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