

**STATEMENT
JIM PEÑA
ASSOCIATE DEPUTY CHIEF, NATIONAL FOREST SYSTEM
FOREST SERVICE
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE**

**BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, FORESTS, AND PUBLIC LANDS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MARCH 8, 2012**

CONCERNING

H.R. 1415, CHETCO RIVER PROTECTION ACT OF 2011

Chairman Bishop and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to provide the views of the Department of Agriculture on H.R. 1415, the Chetco River Protection Act of 2011.

H.R. 1415 amends Sec. 3(a) (69) (A), (B), and (C) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (the Act) to make technical corrections to the segment divisions for the Chetco River in Oregon. The bill would also add language to the Act to provide for withdrawal of the land within the entire river boundary (44.5 miles and all classifications), subject to valid existing rights, from all forms of appropriation or disposal under the public land laws; location, entry, and patent under the United States mining laws; and disposition under laws relating to mineral and geothermal leasing or mineral materials.

We support the legislation. The Chetco River was added to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System in 1988 to protect its important anadromous fishery, water quality, and recreational values. The Chetco River supports significant populations of anadromous winter steelhead, fall Chinook salmon, and sea-run cutthroat with resident cutthroat and rainbow trout abundant in its upper reaches. The River has striking water color and clarity, and ability to clear quickly following storm events. It also contributes exceptionally pure and clean water to the domestic water supplies for the communities of Brookings and Harbor, Oregon. The withdrawal proposed in this bill will help protect these regionally significant values.

There are two technical corrections proposed in this bill. The first would move the divisional boundary to extend the wild segment of the river 2 miles. The second would move the divisional boundary to extend the scenic segment of the river 1.5 miles. Both changes better reflect the respective classifications. There is no change in the overall mileage of the designated portion of the Chetco River. These technical changes are consistent with the recommendation in the decision notice for the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest's comprehensive river management plan for the Chetco River which was signed in 1993.

The wild segment of the Chetco River was withdrawn from mining and mineral leasing when the

River was designated, as are all wild river classifications by the enabling legislation. To provide time for Congress to consider and take action on legislation introduced in June 2010 (H.R. 5526 and S. 3488), the Forest Service submitted a request to the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management to withdraw the approximate 5,610 acres within the scenic and recreational segments of the Chetco River boundary for 5 years in order to protect this area from future mining claims. This withdrawal request was published in the Federal Register on August 1, 2011, and is consistent with the lands described in H.R. 1415.

All withdrawals are subject to valid existing rights and validity exams will have to be conducted on any proposed mining activity.