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Congressman Brian Baird
Testimony before the Subcommittee of Forests and Forest Health
House Committee on Resources
September 29, 2004

Mr. Chairman, I'd like to thank you and the Ranking Member for providing me with the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee today on H.R.2397, legislation that designates a portion of the upper White Salmon River as a component of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. This is an important conservation bill that is endorsed by a wide variety of environmental and recreational organizations, local community and business leaders, as well as the Administration.

The White Salmon River, located in south-central Washington, is known for its exhilarating whitewater rapids, stunning scenery, and abundant fish and wildlife. In 1986, the river's outstanding qualities received national recognition when Congress designated the lower eight miles of the White Salmon as a National Wild and Scenic River. Congress also directed the Forest Service to study the upper White Salmon for possible designation into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

The study determined that the upper White Salmon River and its tributary, Cascade Creek, are eligible for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System based on their free-flowing condition and outstandingly remarkable scenic, hydrologic, geologic, and wildlife values. The study included extensive public involvement by a broadly inclusive task force. Based on the study, the Secretary of Agriculture concluded that the "outstanding natural, scenic and recreational values of the recommended segment of the upper White Salmon are unique and irreplaceable resources. We believe that the best use of the proposed river segments and the immediate environment would be served by adding this . . . segment to the existing White Salmon Wild and Scenic River."

H.R. 2397 would designate the upper White Salmon river segments within the Gifford Pinchot National Forest, totaling twenty miles, into the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. All portions to be designated are already under U.S. Forest Service management. In my view, this designation is an important step in maintaining the beauty and integrity of this area. Designation would preserve the river's free-flowing nature, its hydrologic and geologic values, and the rural lifestyle around it. Such designation would also enhance tourism-based economic opportunities within the local community and throughout the region. Therefore, I worked with local business and community leaders, and recreational and environmental groups to formulate legislation that could be accepted by all affected parties. I believe we have succeeded.

Finally, I believe it is important to specifically highlight the five following points:

- The land that would be designated is all public land, no private land is included.
- This land is currently being managed as if it is already a part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.
- The LEIS study has already been completed, and H.R. 2397 is the preferred alternative.
- The designation has broad public support within the local community and throughout the region.
- This legislation is supported by the Administration.

I commend Phyllis Clausen, the Friends of the White Salmon, Connie Kelleher, American Rivers, the SDS Lumber Company, and the U.S. Forest Service for working together to find a common sense solution and for their efforts to protect the Upper White Salmon River. This process has taken several years and they deserve a great deal of credit for their persistence and teamwork.

I am also very grateful to the Washington Delegation for their efforts, and also Senator Maria Cantwell for leading the effort in the U.S. Senate to pass this legislation. Her willingness to step forward to help provide environmental and economic benefits to Southwest Washington is greatly appreciated. It is my hope that we will see the Upper White Salmon River designated as a National Wild and Scenic River very soon.