

TO: The Honorable Nick J. Rahall
House Natural Resources Committee

RE: HR 3513: The Copper Salmon Wilderness Act

Thank you for the opportunity to testify supporting HR 3513, the Copper Salmon Wilderness Act. I am a consulting forester, a watershed restorationist, a founding board member of Friends of Elk River, and the Executive Director of Elk River Land Trust. I have lived, worked, and fished in Elk River's watershed since 1974. In those 33 years I have covered every part of the watershed.

To speak before you today, I've traveled from Port Orford, a small fishing village located along a remote stretch of Pacific Highway 101 that's known as America's Wild Rivers Coast — and our weather is every bit as wild as our rivers are.

I represent Friends of Elk River, Trout Unlimited, Campaign for America's Wilderness, a coalition of sportsmen, the North Curry Chamber of Commerce, the City of Port Orford, the Port Orford Watershed Council, and a Who's Who list of national, State, and local public officials and environmental organizations, who all ask you to protect Elk River — and 50 miles of crystalline headwater streams — by designating the 13,700 acre Copper Salmon Wilderness Area.

The Copper Salmon Wilderness proposal started locally, from the ground up. Our rural community is united in support of wilderness designation for the Copper Salmon area. This is why I traveled across the country — from shore to shore — to explain to you in plain words, that the ecology and the economy of our remote fishing community are deeply interconnected. Our community depends on the health of Elk River watershed and the world-class fishery provided by the North Fork of Elk River. We also know that just as our economic wellbeing is bound to our wild rivers and to our forested watersheds, our wellbeing is also dependant on the clean air and clear water that these forests provide.

After graduating from the University of Rochester in New York State, I came to Oregon and spent much of the following 10 years timber cruising old-growth in the Elk River watershed. Then to support my family, I performed technical forestry contracts for the US

Forest Service throughout the entire Pacific Northwest. So I know what I'm talking about when I say that the Wild & Scenic Elk with its "outstandingly remarkable" water quality, is a real gem in Oregon's crown. I know that for Elk River to maintain this preeminent position, however, we need to protect her headwaters.

During the 1980's and 1990's, stocking survey contracts sent me to check the survival of newly planted conifers in USFS clearcuts. It's easy to remember units in the upper Elk River area. The slope of the land averages more than 80%, with many hillslopes exceeding 100%. All the clearcuts had landslides in the bottom of the units. Invisible from the roads above, these slides delivered sediment to the tributaries below the units. I mapped and noted the slides in the "comments" sections of my data cards. And I'd wince during heavy rainstorms, knowing that slides were sending pulses of sediment downstream that would settle on spawning beds, slowly smothering precious salmon eggs during their incubation periods. Forty years later, logging road failures continue to dump literally tons of rocks into the river. Gravel and cobblestones worked loose by road building, tumble down the watershed for decades, filling deep holes and destroying the low-gradient productive flats that scientists consider barometers of watershed health.

During these contracts, the reason that Elk River was the last south coast watershed to be logged became obvious. Not only was it the most dangerous and the most expensive watershed to work in — more often than not — serious ecological damage resulted from building roads and logging in this extremely steep, rough, unstable country.

Locals understand that we must protect our natural infrastructure to maintain Elk River's world-class salmon fishery. The Copper Salmon Wilderness proposal has achieved widespread support in Curry County because Elk River's abundant chinook run = the jobs that drive North Curry's economy.

The Sunday before last, my wife and I spent an afternoon at Cape Blanco watching Port Orford's commercial fishing fleet working right off the mouth of Elk River. Their "North Beach" or "bubble" fishery is a special late-season opportunity to catch returning Elk River

salmon. Each Elk River Chinook brought on board means more than \$100 to the boat's captain.

The Copper Salmon Wilderness Act can be a "No Cost" action by the Federal Government. Because of its high ecological value, the Elk was designated a Tier I Key Watershed 13 years ago. Remember, many of these slopes are 100% and greater. Any attempts to manage plantations which should never have been logged in the first place, or to decommission already-impassable roads, will create disturbance. And we've learned that even the slightest disturbance in Elk River's fragile headwaters degrades the watershed.

There is no matrix in Copper Salmon. However, as was the case with the adjacent Grassy Knob Wilderness Area, old timber plantations — the legacy of imprudent management that took place decades ago — remain inside the Copper Salmon Wilderness. Including these re-grown plantations and using main roads as the Copper Salmon Wilderness Area boundary, circumvents high-priced land surveying and mapping expenses. It's the no-cost, sensible way to go that best safeguards the North Fork's ecosystem and watershed values.

Indiscriminate incursions notwithstanding, Elk River watershed remains one of the most intact low-elevation temperate rain forests in the world. Although the entire area has been off-limits to logging for the past 13 years, there will inevitably be continued attempts to go back after the North Fork's timber, each furtive attempt further damaging and eventually irreparably destroying our world-class salmon fishery. The only way to really protect this unique, extremely important area for perpetuity is by awarding it Congressional protection as Wilderness.

I want to re-emphasize that I'm a forester and that I agree with the need to thin vast areas of second-growth plantations. I also feel certain places should be left untouched for watershed protection reasons. Here are two of many reasons the Copper Salmon Wilderness is among those places:

1. I can still look through twenty feet of clean, clear water and see every stone on the riverbed below; and
2. The thrill of a forty-pound Chinook salmon pulling and jumping while I try to hang on to my fishing rod, is a connection with nature that I hope to share with my grandchildren.

HR 3513 proclaims that big fish and exceptional water quality can be part of all American's futures. All of the areas within the proposed Copper Salmon Wilderness meet the criteria of the Wilderness Act.

Please protect Elk River (and 50 miles of crystalline headwater streams) by authorizing the —no disturbance/no cost — Copper Salmon Wilderness Act as expeditiously as possible.

From retirees to schoolchildren, all facets of our coastal community support wilderness designation for the Copper Salmon area. Church groups, business leaders, fishermen, artists, and thousands of visitors who travel great distances to smell the sea air and glimpse the area's unparalleled beauty, join me in urging you to release us from the old boom and bust cycle of resource extraction, and to make our vision of economic stability a reality by establishing the Copper Salmon Wilderness Area.

There is nothing to restore, we simply need to permanently protect Elk River's headwaters. Thank you for your wisdom on this far-reaching matter and thank you for the opportunity to speak before this hearing today. I look forward to answering your questions.

Very Sincerely,

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