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President
Molalla River Alliance

H.R. 2781: To amend the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to designate segments of the Molalla River in Oregon, as components of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

October 1, 2009

The Molalla River is an Oregon natural treasure. It is vital to local communities in Oregon's Willamette Valley. Among other attributes, the Molalla River is the primary drinking water source for the cities of Molalla and Canby.

However, for far too many years the Molalla River corridor has been wracked with destructive and inappropriate human behavior including

- Extensive dumping
- Littering
- Vandalism
- Violence
- Drug use and underage drinking parties
- Illegal camping
- Human waste
- Degradation of the health of the fishery

The Molalla River Alliance

These unacceptable activities prompted creation of an unprecedented and broad-based local collaboration. Established in early 2008, the Molalla River Alliance ("Alliance") is an all-volunteer coalition of more than 45 non-profit civic and conservation groups, regional, local, state and federal agencies, numerous

user groups and a rapidly growing list of individual conservationists and property owners.

Over the past year, the Alliance has



evolved into an important community forum for improving the safety and quality of the Molalla River Recreation Corridor. The Alliance initiated and leads efforts to secure Wild and Scenic Rivers legislation. The Alliance also was the impetus for a much-needed increase in law enforcement in the Corridor, resulting in a dramatic and sustained decline in lawless and inappropriate behaviors.

The key goals of the Molalla River Alliance are to preserve water quality of the river, sustain the wildlife, fish and plants that inhabit its watershed, while promoting a safe and healthy environment that encourages diverse enjoyment of the recreation area, including tourism and family-friendly activities.

The Alliance has taken a leading role in galvanizing numerous stakeholders, scientists and policy makers whose commitment first is to the health of the river and its ecosystems, for consequential enjoyment by all people.

The Alliance has successfully forged a productive partnership of diverse, divergent, and frequently opposing groups such as wild fish advocates sitting next to hatchery fish advocates; anti-logging advocates sitting next to timber growers; hunters sitting next to horse riders and hikers; and, fly fishermen sitting next to bait fishermen.

This group of non-traditional allies works because all have found a common bond, which is the shared passion for this storied river.

For these efforts to be successful Alliance members endorse an “ecosystem-based management” approach which simply means it places benefits to the river above those of any single species, activity, or group, including humans. No goal or priority of the Molalla River Alliance favors the interests of any single group or individual.

The Alliance is confident its efforts represent a rare opportunity to safeguard and preserve in perpetuity an ecological, geological and historical treasure, offering myriad recreational opportunities, convenient to a major metropolitan area.

The Molalla River

The Molalla River supports bountiful ecosystems and offers year-round recreational opportunities within an hour’s drive of a major metropolitan area. It provides extensive native fish habitat including critical cold tributary spawning streams. It is home to wild winter steelhead and salmon runs, an abundance of wildlife, and geological and cultural wonders.

From its headwaters beyond the Table Rock Wilderness in the Cascade Mountain Range, the crystal-clear and biologically diverse Molalla River originates in coniferous forests and tumbles through private and public forests and agricultural lands to its confluence with the Willamette River approximately 53 miles away.

The Molalla River cuts through basalts and lava, forming deep canyons and beautiful rock out-crops including columnar rosettes and basalt columns which can be seen on the canyon walls. Carbon dating fossil leaves has placed the Molalla formation in the upper Miocene period, or 15 million years ago.

The Molalla River and its watershed support vital fish habitats, including native winter steelhead and salmon runs, resident rainbow and cutthroat trout, and a naturalized population of Coho salmon. The upper river and its major tributaries provide critical spawning and rearing habitat.



Distinct populations of Molalla River steelhead and salmon are listed as 'threatened' under the Endangered Species Act.

This area also serves as an important wildlife corridor containing breeding and rearing habitat for northern spotted owl, pileated woodpecker, red tree vole, red-legged frog and pacific giant salamander. It provides habitat for bears, elk, cougars, bobcat, deer, beaver, otter, hawks, osprey and both golden and bald eagles.

Recreational and Cultural Uses

The Molalla River Recreation Corridor is also of significant cultural, historic and recreational significance. Formerly the site of working steam donkeys, railroads and logging camps, today it offers year-round recreational opportunities.

Annually, thousands of recreationalists visit the Corridor for hiking, kayaking and white water rafting, touring and mountain biking, camping, horseback riding, hunting, fishing, swimming, picnicking, nature watching, or to simply enjoy nature. There are more than 30 miles of non-motorized trails.

Historically, an extensive system of trails existed along the Molalla River. These trails were principal trade routes across the Cascades between indigenous peoples of the northern Willamette Valley and Eastern Oregon. The Molalla Indians used one such trail in the early 1800's which is now called the Table Rock Historic Trail. During the 1920's this same trail was utilized by Native Americans from the Warm Springs Reservation to reach traditional berry picking areas near the Molalla River and Table Rock. Searching for gold and land to homestead, Euro-Americans began moving into the area during the late 1800's.

The Molalla River is less than 50 miles from downtown Portland, Oregon's largest city. This proximity likely means more and more people will visit as the population of the metropolitan area grows. In 2008 the Corridor saw a 33% increase in use compared to the previous year --- a record number of visitors.

The Molalla River Alliance, including its members American Rivers, Oregon Wild, Native Fish Society and Molalla RiverWatch, are working together to secure Wild and Scenic designation for nearly 22 miles of the upper Molalla River. Designation would protect a quarter mile buffer on both sides of the river, and would therefore protect approximately 7,000 acres of riparian land essential for viable fish and wildlife habitat. These protections include a segment of the main Molalla River (15.1 miles) and also the Table Rock Fork (6.2 miles).

The upper river is also benefiting from river restoration efforts by numerous Molalla River Alliance members that will enhance native fish migration and overall river health. These current actions provide an opportunity for decision-makers to ensure that the Molalla River and its values are protected and managed for the benefit and enjoyment of the local ecology and communities.

Wild and Scenic River Protection

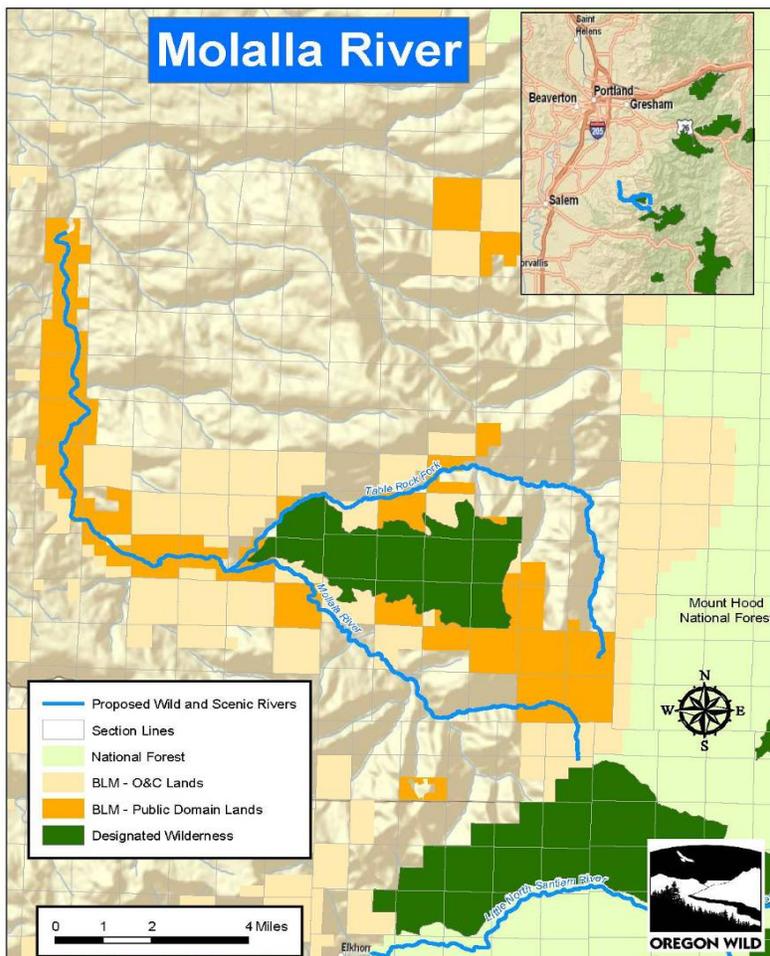
Sustainable management of forest lands and river restoration efforts are both necessary and essential to achieving a healthy river and watershed. A vital expedient to safeguarding the Molalla River and its values is to successfully legislate it a Wild and Scenic River. This designation will provide the Molalla one of our nation's strongest conservation tools for rivers.

Rivers listed under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act are afforded a specific set of protections, including

- Preservation of the river's "outstandingly remarkable values" (ORVs) and its free-flowing character;
- Protection of the existing uses of the river;
- Ban on dams and any federally licensed water project that would have a "direct and adverse" effect on the river's free-flowing character, water quality or outstanding values;
- Creation of a 1/4-mile protected riparian buffer corridor on both sides of the river;
- Protection of the river's water quality (The Molalla River is the source of drinking water for the cities of Molalla and Canby);
- Preservation of the river's unique historic, cultural, scenic, ecological, and recreational values.

Because the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act confers no federal authority over private land use or local zoning, there is no practical impact on private property. Riverside landowners will not be told what to do with their property or have their land confiscated by the federal government.

To the point, not a single property owner has voiced opposition to Wild and Scenic designation for the Molalla River.



The river was studied and found suitable for Wild and Scenic Rivers designation by the Bureau of Land Management. The Outstandingly Remarkable Values attributed to the Molalla River are recreation, scenic and geology. The federal agency's implicit support is an impetus to ensure designation is achieved.

Even more so, widespread support of the local community through the broad-based Molalla River Alliance confirms Wild and Scenic protection is a priority for area stakeholders, policy makers and river users. Designation by Congress would mean the river's values will be protected in perpetuity. Wild and Scenic River protections will benefit the local community and economy because the designation serves as a stimulus to visitors and tourists.

Benefits of a Wild & Scenic Molalla River to Local Communities

The City of Molalla's and Clackamas County's interest in the Molalla River, and in obtaining Wild and Scenic River status, is very practical. First, it's Molalla's sole source of drinking water. So it's very much in Molalla's interest to ensure that the Molalla River continues to run pure and clean. The city believes Wild and Scenic River status will help protect this critical resource from any future degradation.

The second reason Molalla and Clackamas County support Congressman Schrader's bill is that Wild and Scenic River status brings with it a certain cachet that will attract more visitors to Molalla. City leaders see Molalla becoming a destination point for tourism. Visitors drawn by the appeal of a Wild and Scenic River may discover Molalla's numerous other tourist-based activities. Restoring and enhancing wild salmon and steelhead runs in the river means more visits to Molalla by anglers and campers, more stops at restaurants and motels, more business for outfitters and guides.

One of the city's challenges has been to ensure that this recreation corridor is safe for families to come and play. That has not always been so, but we have made unprecedented strides in the right direction.

Until the last year or two, the Molalla River Recreation Corridor had a reputation that didn't really lend itself to being a family destination. There was unregulated squatting and camping, underage alcohol and pot parties, illegal dumping, vandalism, poaching, no communications, and little if any law enforcement.

In the summer of 2008 that began to change. Prompted by the Molalla River Alliance, the City of Molalla applied for and was designated a "Weed and Seed" site by the U.S. Justice Department, and it began receiving federal funds to carry out measures aimed at weeding out crime and seeding the community with projects and activities to strengthen community connections and

opportunities. One of the most effective outcomes so far has been enhanced and interagency law enforcement patrols in the Molalla River Recreation Corridor

These patrols were supplemented by patrols by Clackamas County Sheriff's office, the Oregon State Police, Oregon Fish and Wildlife Department, and the Bureau of Land Management. A magnetized door logo was created to stick on patrol vehicles to give visitors reassurance that this was a coordinated effort. This also put others on notice that it wasn't going to be business as usual.

All of this has resulted in a dramatic and, more important, sustained reduction in lawless behavior, vandalism and dumping. Families are now the primary demographic visiting and camping in the Molalla River Recreation Corridor.

The city is confident that Wild and Scenic River status will help establish a positive, inviting image for this remarkable stretch of river and attract even more conservation-minded individuals and organizations to work with us in protecting this great resource for future generations.

Additional Benefits of Wild and Scenic River Designation

Beyond the direct ban on dams and other federally-assisted water projects that could have a harmful effect on the designated river, numerous identifiable examples exist of ways in which Wild and Scenic Rivers designation has effected positive changes for rivers and nearby communities.

Clearly, designation generates an increase in public awareness and appreciation of a river. Knowledge and education about the importance of the health of the river can foster goodwill in the community and be a positive force for river restoration efforts. Public interest and support can also bring together stakeholders with diverse interests that might not otherwise cooperate, for the sake of the river. Coordination among multiple agencies facilitates the river being managed in a holistic manner.

For numerous Northwest rivers (including the Deschutes, North Fork of the John Day, Salmon, Cascade, Big Marsh Creek, Metolius, Skagit and White Salmon), Wild and Scenic Rivers designation has provided instrumental leverage and garnered additional resources for protection, river-related restoration and management of the rivers. In many cases, Wild and Scenic Rivers designation priorities a particular project in the eyes of government agencies and other funding organizations.

Because a Wild and Scenic River has been vetted through the designation process, a river stands out and is elevated among funding agencies who know their money is more likely to be used effectively. Increased public awareness can be a powerful and effective force to obtain funding to better manage, protect and restore a river.

In an era of tight funding, Wild and Scenic Rivers designation garners attention when agencies are developing resources. Designation can be instrumental in attracting funding for acquisitions and conservation easements of key parcels in the river corridor. Parcels may need to be acquired in the river corridor to ensure their protection or to provide additional public access, among other reasons.

Wild and Scenic designation provides a point of focus that attracts interest and naturally lends itself to the formation of partnerships. Through Wild and Scenic designation local, state and federal agencies, landowners, recreation users, non-profit organizations and others have a framework to come together and work to protect, restore and ensure public access to the river. Designation elevates the public's perception of the river as an important national resource.

CLOSING

On behalf of the Molalla River Alliance and the community of Molalla, I urge the Committee to support Wild and Scenic Rivers designation for the many benefits it will provide to natural and human communities along the Molalla River.