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## Hastings' Statement on Molalla River Wild and Scenic Bill

*"You can't advocate for these schools and for wiser timber and forest management to ensure jobs in towns across the Northwest, while at the same time advancing legislation that makes the problem permanently worse. That's what this bill does."*

**WASHINGTON, D.C.** – Today, House Natural Resources Committee Ranking Member Doc Hastings (WA-04) delivered the following floor speech on H.R. 2781, a bill to designate segments of the Molalla River in Oregon as components of the Wild and Scenic River Systems. As with all wild and scenic rivers, this designation could prevent full recreation use and economic development on this land, as well as potentially impact neighboring private property. In addition, this bill would block timber production on over 400 acres of land, resulting in lost job opportunities and reduced tax revenue for rural communities in Oregon where statewide unemployment has reached 11.5 percent and is even higher in timber-job dependent areas.



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"Mr. Speaker, I oppose this legislation, yet I do so with a degree of conflicting views.

On the one hand, I have fundamental concern with the impacts that wild and scenic river designations can have on surrounding property owners, river users either upstream or downstream, and the restrictions that such designations can have on private citizens. Most importantly, such designations preclude the ability to make future decisions without an act

of Congress. **There are many ways to protect and manage our rivers without imposing such absolute, permanent and inflexible mandates that do not allow us to adapt to new circumstances, evolving environmental science, and changing public needs and views.**

On the other hand, I am sympathetic when a Member of this House proposes legislation that directly affects the District that he represents. I believe we must be respectful of the views of those elected to represent a district, and this is a two-way street. It means affording a level of deference when a Member has a proposal that affects just his district, and it means an even stronger degree of respect and deference when a Member opposes an action that is proposed in the district he was elected to represent.

It's very troubling to me to see bills introduced and referred to the Natural Resources Committee that would have extensive, and often drastic, negative impacts on the economic livelihoods of local communities, workers and their families in the Western United States, but that are authored and sponsored by Members from the East Coast and the nation's big cities. The lack of respect is very troubling.

Therefore, while I generally do not support such inflexible and restrictive river designations, I do have respect for the fact that Mr. Schrader of Oregon is the sponsor of this bill and it directly affects his district.

At the same time, **I must agree with a position clearly stated by Mr. Schrader during his testimony at the Subcommittee hearing on his bill. At that hearing, Mr. Schrader said he was sensitive to the fact that this river designation would impact over 400 acres of timber matrix lands. When timber is responsibly and sustainably harvested on these matrix lands, funds are provided directly to local schools and communities.** This is a way of partially compensating areas of the West that are home to high percentages of federal land for federal policies that limit economic development. **These timber matrix lands are a commitment that's been made and they're critical to the ability of hundreds of schools to properly educate children and for communities to provide essential services.**

Mr. Schrader, to his credit, said he was sensitive to the harm his bill would have on these lands and the schools and communities that depend on these lands. In his October 1<sup>st</sup> testimony, **Mr. Schrader specifically stated, and I quote, 'I would ask the Chairman and Ranking Member to work with me and my staff to ensure there will be no net-loss of the acres available for timber management as a result of this legislation.'** End quote.

Mr. Speaker, **no such provision or protection or offset has been included in this bill despite the honest recognition and explicit request from Mr. Schrader that action needed to be taken to protect lands important to schools and communities.**

**Several efforts to amend the bill to simply provide that lands be identified elsewhere to replace those 400 plus acres locked up under the river designation have been blocked.** First they were blocked in the Natural Resources Committee markup. On Tuesday they were blocked by the Democrat Majority on the Rules Committee. The need to

address the loss of these timber matrix lands and the schools that depend upon such lands was clearly identified and then ignored.

**Now, we learned on Tuesday afternoon, which was November 17<sup>th</sup>, that seven days earlier, Mr. Schrader had sent a letter to the Natural Resources Committee Chairman that appears to shift away from his Subcommittee testimony that clearly asked for help in ensuring the loss of timber lands be addressed in his legislation.** This letter states, quote, 'I am satisfied that this designation will not remove trees from the timber stock: there are no timber contracts in that area, and no timber sales are planned.' End quote. Mr. Schrader's letter further states that on the question of offsetting logging acreage that, quote, 'I see no need to add such language to H.R. 2781 at this time.' End quote.

**This letter of November 10<sup>th</sup> appears to directly contradict Mr. Schrader's public testimony on October 1<sup>st</sup>.** Was the statement made in his testimony a mistake made in understanding the bill he authored, or is the position taken in his letter a reversal of his request for help on fixing the timber matrix lands? When he states that language is not needed 'at this time', does he mean that his view on the need for offsetting acreage may change yet again in the future?

Mr. Schrader's letter implies that there is no reason to offset these lands because no current timber contracts exist, nor are there logging plans at the current time. This begs the question, is the concern for school funding only today, and not what will happen tomorrow and in the future? Of course there are no logging jobs there at this moment. It is well known throughout the Northwest that timber harvest is at a standstill due to the struggling economy and the sharp drop in housing starts. In fact, just yesterday, the Natural Resources Committee approved a bill to allow for existing federal logging contracts to be extended due to poor economic conditions. So, yesterday, the bad timber market is used to push legislation to ensure existing contracts can carry forward, but today the bad market is used to excuse legislation that will lock up hundreds of acres not just till the market turns around, but forever.

These are not insignificant questions and clarity is needed. I very much hope we have the opportunity to resolve this apparent discrepancy as debate continues.

**Again and again, this Congress acts to remove more and more land in the West from active, sustainable timber management. It is our schoolchildren that are paying the highest price as school budgets are squeezed ever tighter due to the actions of the federal government. You can't advocate for these schools and for wiser timber and forest management to ensure jobs in towns across the Northwest, while at the same time advancing legislation that makes the problem permanently worse. That's what this bill does.**

**Some may say, but its only 400 acres. Yet, if it is such a small amount, then why the resistance to offsetting these lands? An offset ought to be easy if it's so small.** The fact of the matter is that this 400 acres comes on top of thousands and thousands of acres locked up in recent years. Excusing this 400 acres today feeds the notion that tomorrow or next week we can excuse taking 6,000 acres away from helping schools and rural communities.

Congress must take responsibility for its actions and the impact it's having. **It's time to demand that schoolchildren and small towns don't pay the price for the unwillingness of those in Congress to provide offsets for their actions.** For these reasons, I urge my colleagues to oppose this bill."

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