

Testimony
Congressman Peter DeFazio
H.R. 1413
Devils Staircase Wilderness Act
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands Legislative Hearing
October 25, 2011

Thank you Chairman Bishop for holding this hearing and for including H.R. 1413, the Devil's Staircase Wilderness Act.

My bill would designate approximately 30,000 acres of the Siuslaw National Forest and the Bureau of Land Management's Coos Bay District as the Devil's Staircase Wilderness Area. The bill would also designate a 4.5 mile segment of Franklin Creek and a 10-mile segment of Wasson Creek as "wild." These feeder streams support federally listed Coho and Chinook salmon.

Having undertaken the day-long trek to the series of cascading pools that give the area its name, I can personally attest to the rugged nature and extraordinary beauty of Devil's Staircase. If there is a place in Oregon that meets the "untrammelled by man" definition in the Wilderness Act, Devil's Staircase is that place.

H.R. 1413 should not be a controversial bill. The area represents one of the largest remaining old growth forests and the largest roadless area in Oregon Coast Range – where less than 10% of the land remains unlogged.

With 1,800 foot canyons, the area is unsuitable for logging and road-building. In fact, the forest soils in the area are mostly classified as the most landside-prone soil type in Oregon and among the most unstable in the world.

Unstable soils so plagued early efforts to log in the vicinity of Devil's Staircase that, in the 1970s, the U.S. Forest Service withdrew from

timber management all land between the Smith and Umpqua Rivers – the location of the proposed wilderness area.

Today, Devil’s Staircase is designated as a Late Successional Reserve, which is managed to protect and enhance the habitat for old growth-related species under the Northwest Forest Plan. The area is also designated as critical habitat for the northern spotted owl – a federally listed species. Even under the controversial 2008 Western Oregon Plan Revisions, the area was off-limits to logging.

I am currently working with the Oregon Congressional Delegation, Governor Kitzhaber, and key stakeholders on a long-term management plan for the O&C Lands – a unique set of lands in western Oregon. Our goals include providing a more predictable supply of timber to rural communities, greater financial certainty to forested counties, and lasting protection for the most sensitive places on the landscape.

In every scenario discussed for the O&C Lands, there is broad and bipartisan agreement that Devil’s Staircase should be protected as wilderness. Even the Association of O&C Counties has agreed in its proposal for the O&C Lands that Devil’s Staircase should be off the table.

I have gone to great lengths to accommodate concerns from neighboring landowners and key stakeholders. In my bill, I explicitly protect all valid and existing rights between federal land management agencies and private parties. This includes reciprocal right-of-way, tail-hold, and access agreements.

I included a section in the bill to protect fishing and hunting privileges.

I accommodated the Chairman’s concerns about “Buffer Zones” by adding language from the previous Congress clarifying that my bill does not include protective perimeters or buffer zones around the wilderness area.

And, while not explicitly stated, Devil's Staircase would fully comply with the Wilderness Act by allowing the respective secretaries to take necessary measures to control fire, insects, and disease.

I appreciate the Obama Administration's support for H.R. 1413. And, I look forward to working with you Chairman Bishop and my colleagues on the committee to move this legislation forward.

I am happy to answer any questions.