

Committee on Resources, Subcommittee on Forests & Forest Health

[forests](#) - - Rep. Scott McInnis, Chairman

U.S. House of Representatives, Washington, D.C. 20515-6205 - - (202) 225-0691

Witness Statement

**Statement of
Congressman Earl Blumenauer
3rd District, Oregon
on
H.R. 427
Little Sandy Watershed Protection Act
Before the Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health
Resources Committee
United States House of Representatives
April 25, 2001**

Mr. Chairman, and members of the subcommittee, I am Congressman Earl Blumenauer, representing the 3rd Congressional District in Oregon. I appreciate the opportunity to come before you today, to describe our efforts to protect the Little Sandy Watershed. As you know, my distinguished colleagues, Senator Ron Wyden and Senator Gordon Smith, have introduced an identical measure in the Senate (SB 254), and I appreciate the committee moving so rapidly on this matter.

Perhaps no resource is more fundamental to the livability of our communities than clean, safe drinking water. Fresh, pure water is critical for life and health and is not necessarily a renewable resource. There is no environmental goal that should have higher priority than protecting our valuable sources of drinking water. To ensure the health of our families today and of our communities in the future, we must act to ensure that our water supplies are protected and used wisely.

HR 427 recognizes that the Bull Run Watershed is the Portland area's cleanest and most reliable drinking water source, serving nearly one million residents. Established in 1892, the Bull Run Reserve was hailed as a drinking water source that could be shielded from human activities that pollute water. After its first municipal use in 1895 a "phenomenal decrease" in typhoid fever resulted. Protection of water quality and quantity, as well as preservation of the forest, was enhanced in 1904 under President Roosevelt's Trespass Act, which allowed only those who affirmatively protected the forest and its streams to enter the reserve.

However, during the 1950's, these protections were threatened when illegal logging began in the Bull Run. Logging was also extended to the Little Sandy Watershed, and by 1993, more than 350 miles of roads were built, mostly to facilitate logging, and sediment from these activities flowed into drinking water reserves.

In 1996, Congress established partial protection for the "Bull Run Management Unit" (BRMU) through the Oregon Resources Conservation Act. Since then, citizens, the City of Portland, and officials throughout the region have championed enacting permanent protections for the public lands in the Bull Run Management

Unit and the Little Sandy Watershed. In fact, work to protect Bull Run began with the efforts of former Senator Mark Hatfield. A bill to include the Little Sandy watershed in the Bull Run Management Unit was introduced in both the 105th and 106th sessions of Congress.

The bill before you today, HR 427, extends the protection of Bull Run Management Unit by nearly 2600 acres to include the Little Sandy drainage and provides for consistent land management protections for all lands within the Bull Run Management Unit. Why must we protect the Little Sandy? It is a potential future source of drinking water for the Portland area. It is also a critical habitat for endangered fish species, including steelhead, cutthroat trout and chinook.

I am aware that some have raised concerns with this bill, and I would like to take a moment to address those. Last year, during a hearing in the Senate, the U.S. Forest Service testified that it stood in opposition to the legislation on the grounds that adding additional protection for the Little Sandy was not warranted. They claim the Northwest Forest Plan provides adequate protection for this important resource and to the federal lands within the Bull Run Management Unit. Yet as of today, 37% of the Little Sandy Watershed has been lost to timber harvest, and much of that was through damaging clearcut methods. Such practices can have a detrimental effect on water quality and water quantity, not to mention the fragile forest ecosystem that, particularly in the Little Sandy, supports several species of endangered fish that are listed under the Endangered Species Act, as well as probably countless smaller organisms that have never been surveyed. Under H.R.427, we will finally achieve a lasting, permanent, and meaningful protection for the Little Sandy and all of the lands within Bull Run Management Unit.

Opponents also point to studies from the last decade which they claim dismiss the option of the Little Sandy as a future potential drinking water source. I am fortunate to be joined today by Mike Rosenberger, chief administrator for the City of Portland's Bureau of Water Works. His testimony describes why it is critical that the City maintain a full range of potential options for the future when it comes to managing a sustainable, long-term vision for drinking water, not just in Portland, but throughout the region. But I would also add that I think, given the challenges of meeting future demand for a clean, reliable drinking water supply, and fulfilling our Endangered Species Act requirements, local governments and their citizens deserve to have every possible tool at their disposal. By securing permanent protection for the Little Sandy, HR 427 provides just such a tool.

This bill enjoys strong support from the City of Portland. As one who believes that government at all levels must work together more effectively, I see this effort as a model for that kind of cooperation. In addition, the bill is supported by local citizen groups, and local, statewide, and national environmental organizations.

The abundant water supply of the Pacific Northwest has been a blessing, but it is also a responsibility. Protecting it is an obligation that we must not evade.

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