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**Testimony  
Before the Committee on Resources  
United States House of Representatives**

**Hearing on H.R. 5025  
"The Mount Hood Stewardship Legacy Act"  
April 5, 2006**

My name is Ken Rait and I am Campaigns Director for the Campaign for America's Wilderness, a national wilderness advocacy organization. We work with local and state-level partner organizations across the country to assist them in conserving Americans' birthright of wilderness. I appreciate the invitation to participate in this hearing and, on behalf of the Campaign for America's Wilderness and the Oregon Natural Resources Council, to express our support for the wilderness components of Congressmen Walden and Blumenauer's H.R. 5025.

This landmark bill will preserve special wild places like the rugged backcountry of Oregon's Roaring River, the 1000-year-old cedar trees in Big Bottom, the old-growth and drinking watersheds of Eagle Creek, and give better protection to more of the majesty of the existing Salmon-Huckleberry, Mark O. Hatfield, and Mount Hood wilderness areas. The bill also protects free-flowing stretches of five rivers. This new legislation represents an historic step forward, not only for Oregonians, but all Americans who have a stake in our precious national forests.

As a resident of Portland, I know the Mount Hood National Forest well, having hiked many of its trails and climbed its summit. Mount Hood is Oregon's scenic icon. As it is for multitudes of Oregonians and visitors from beyond our state, the Mount Hood National Forest and its wilderness areas are well-loved recreational haunts for my wife and me, and natural treasures in the lives of our two young daughters from their earliest years.

This national forest, so used and loved by Oregonians, has been subject of a progression of legislation in which Congress has worked to protect its extraordinary wilderness resources:

- The Mount Hood Wilderness was designated as one of the first areas in the 1964 Wilderness Act.
- This wilderness area was then expanded by Congress in 1978 in the Endangered American Wilderness Act.
- In 1968, the creation of the Mount Jefferson Wilderness increased the amount of designated acreage in the national forest.
- In the Oregon Wilderness Act of 1984, Congress protected the Badger Creek, Bull-of-the-Woods, Salmon Huckleberry, and Columbia Gorge wilderness areas (the latter renamed in 1996 as the Mark O. Hatfield Wilderness).

Over the past 41 years, the Oregon delegation and Congress have worked repeatedly to protect more wilderness on Mount Hood. We are hopeful that HR 5025 will preserve more of this precious public jewel. This progression is a testament to three important facts:

- First, protection of wilderness has always been an incremental process in Oregon, as in every other state.
- Second, the relationship between Oregonians and this work of preserving wilderness on our federal lands is robust and vibrant. Oregonians cherish their wilderness. Poll after poll, both regional and statewide, as well as the public's enthusiastic engagement in Representative Walden and Blumenauer's listening sessions on the issue, reveals Oregonians' commitment to ensuring a lasting wilderness legacy for future generations.
- Third, the Congressional commitment to preserving Oregon's wilderness areas has always been bipartisan—with H.R. 5025, Representatives Greg Walden and Earl Blumenauer are continuing that fine tradition of working together across partisan divides for the benefit of all Oregonians.

The people of Oregon have never looked back on what is now more than four decades of work on these wilderness designations and regretted conserving precious areas as an enduring legacy for our children. Rather, we have most often regretted failing to protect other special places that have since been lost to development.

Despite all the good work Oregon's congressional leaders have done to protect wilderness, adjacent states have done better. Every one of the states around us has done more: of California's total land area, 14.1 percent is designated wilderness; of Washington's total land area, 10.1 percent is designated wilderness; and of Idaho's total land area, 7.6 percent is designated wilderness; but of Oregon's

total land area, just 3.7 percent is designated wilderness. Clearly we can do better, and like so many other Oregonians, I believe we must do better. H.R. 5025 is an important step in the right direction, and following its passage, we look forward to working with the Oregon congressional delegation to protect deserving areas elsewhere in Oregon such as Spring Basin, Badlands, Soda Mountain, and Copper Salmon.

We must never lose sight of the fact that we protect wilderness for people—and when it comes to preserving wilderness for the enjoyment of Oregonians, we have just not kept up with the growing demands of an increasing population that is more focused on outdoor activities than ever before. In the 21 years since new wilderness areas were last designated on the Mount Hood National Forest, the population in the local counties has expanded significantly: up 20 percent in Multnomah County; 24 percent in Hood River County; and 41 percent in Clackamas County.

It is simply good common sense that our congressional leaders plan for this growth by conserving more lands as a responsible natural legacy, lest we and our children look back with regret.

Between 1997 and 2001, I served as Conservation Director for the Oregon Natural Resources Council. During this time, I directed an inventory of the remaining wildlands across the national forests in Oregon. This highly technical study process involved Geographic Information System mapping together with a field review program that involved hundreds of volunteers “ground-truthing” the results. On the Mount Hood National Forest, our inventory revealed some 260,000 acres of roadless lands.

Serious political dialogue about protecting more Mount Hood wilderness gained momentum in 2003 when Representatives Walden and Blumenauer reached across the “Cascade Curtain” to work in a bipartisan fashion to address this and related issues on the forest. Year after year, the congressmen rolled up their sleeves, talked with stakeholders, listened to the public, and worked deliberately, carefully, and inclusively.

During the 108<sup>th</sup> Congress, Senator Ron Wyden introduced a 177,000-acre wilderness proposal for the northern part of the national forest. Senator Wyden’s bill incorporated a number of areas important to the conservation community, but never made it out of the Senate Energy Committee.

Seven months ago, I hiked with Representatives Walden and Blumenauer during part of their four-day, 41-mile trek around Mount Hood. Along the Timberline Trail we talked about our shared values of wanting to leave a legacy for future generations, our responsibility to protect key areas in order to ensure

abundant, clean drinking water for downstream communities and important habitat for salmon and other native wildlife. The three of us understand that there is a great deal of common ground on Mount Hood and that the foundation for this common ground is the wilderness we are committed to protecting.

Engaging a broad spectrum of stakeholders, Representatives Walden and Blumenauer introduced, on March 28, H.R. 5025, the Mount Hood Stewardship Legacy Act.

The Campaign for America's Wilderness supports the wilderness components of this legislation. Admittedly, the bill does not protect all the areas on the Mount Hood that so many of us in Oregon believe should be protected as wilderness. Special places like Tamanawas Falls, Boulder Lake, Bonney Butte, Fifteenmile Creek, and Memaloose Lake should be conserved as wilderness, and we remain hopeful that as this bill proceeds through the congressional review process or in the future, these areas will be added. Nonetheless, in the spirit of each of the earlier wilderness laws for this national forest, the wilderness provisions of H.R. 5025 offer an important next step and one that merits our strong support.

The Campaign for America's Wilderness is part of a broad coalition of Oregon conservation interests that includes Trout Unlimited, the Oregon Natural Resources Council, The Wilderness Society, Friends of the Columbia Gorge, Backcountry Hunters and Anglers, the Sierra Club, and others. Some of these groups have expressed concerns about some provisions in this bill that they will detail in their own testimony.

The substantive scope of our testimony is limited to the wilderness provisions of this bill. The provisions not only increase the amount of designated wilderness on the Mount Hood National Forest by more than 40 percent, but they do so in a way that upholds the integrity of the 1964 Wilderness Act and respects those who use this national forest in other ways.

Chairman Walden and Representative Blumenauer have, in this legislation, shown remarkable leadership and commitment to Mount Hood wilderness in the very finest tradition of Oregon bipartisanship, and are exercising the responsibility that we have to pass along wild places to our children and all future generations.

We look forward to working with the congressmen and with Senators Ron Wyden and Gordon Smith as legislation for the Mount Hood National Forest works its way through Congress this year. Wilderness is our common ground on Mount Hood and across the nation. Today the Campaign for America's Wilderness stands in strong support of the hard work this dedicated, bipartisan team is doing to protect it, and to grant our children an enduring natural legacy.