

STATEMENT OF RON SUPPAH, CHAIRMAN,
THE CONFEDERATED TRIBES OF THE WARM SPRINGS
RESERVATION OF OREGON,
REGARDING H.R. 5025,
THE MT. HOOD STEWARDSHIP LEGACY ACT

U.S. House of Representatives
Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health

Washington, D.C.

April 5, 2006

Good morning, Chairman Walden and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Ron Suppah and I am chairman of the Tribal Council of the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon. I am here today to express the strong support our tribe for this proposed legislation, which promises not only to provide greater protection for Mt. Hood but also provides for exercise of some of the most important rights reserved by our people in our Treaty of June 25, 1855.

Mt. Hood is sacred to our people. We are Columbia River Indian people who originally lived along the Great River and its Oregon tributaries in the shadow of Mt. Hood. In our 1855 Treaty we agreed to move from the Columbia to the present day Warm Springs Indian Reservation but only if we were guaranteed the right to continue to exercise our traditional Indian way of life on unclaimed lands outside the reservation. The 1855 Treaty provided us with this guarantee by expressly reserving our continued right to gather roots, berries and other traditional Indian foods on public lands, such as the Mt. Hood National Forest, outside the reservation. We believe that this legislation is an important step in protecting these rights.

Before addressing the specific provisions of this bill, let me first explain how we became involved in the development of this legislation. Last summer, a number of our tribal elders, including Delvis Heath, Chief of the Warm Springs Tribe and a lifetime member of the Warm Springs Tribal Council, joined Rep. Walden and Rep. Blumenauer on a hike around Mt. Hood. During the hike Chief Heath and other tribal members had an opportunity to discuss at length with the Congressmen and their staffs what Mt. Hood means to our people and how we rely on the mountain and its surrounding area for many of the traditional foods that are the foundation our Indian way of life. The hike proved to be a unique opportunity for us to have direct input in the development of the legislation that is before you today.

As the bill was being drafted we continued to have an opportunity to comment on aspects of the legislation that touch on our 1855 Treaty rights and on our traditional Indian way of life. The result is the legislation introduced on March 28, 2006, which we believe will provide added protection for our 1855 Treaty food gathering rights on Mt. Hood National Forest lands, and will help guarantee the continuing vitality of our traditional Indian way of life.

Now, let me address the specifics of the bill. Title VII, concerning "Local and Tribal

Relationships" is the portion of the legislation that provides for the set aside, development and management of "priority use areas" for tribal members to gather huckleberries and other "first foods" pursuant to their 1855 Treaty rights. The bill lays out a process for the priority use areas on the Mt. Hood National Forest to be determined by the U.S. Forest Service and the Warm Springs Tribe pursuant to an existing memorandum of understanding between our tribe, the Forest Service and other federal agencies. We see tremendous benefits in Title VII in that it gives us an active voice in the management of "first foods" on Mt. Hood National Forest lands and it also guarantees the Treaty Indian people exclusive use of certain areas for the gathering of huckleberries and other "first foods". These provisions of the legislation offer great promise in protecting and implementing the off-reservation food gathering rights expressly reserved in our 1855 Treaty.

Section 704 of the bill is a strong and essential savings provision that safeguards our specific 1855 Treaty rights and our lands, including the tribal fishing sites along the Columbia.

Another important provision of the legislation is Sec. 103 (i), which authorizes the Secretary of Agriculture, at the request of Warm Springs or any other tribe with rights on Mt. Hood National Forest lands, to impose temporary closures of newly designated wilderness areas so that tribal members may carry out traditional cultural and religious activities. This is a very sensitive and respectful provision of the legislation, which recognizes the legitimate need of Indian people to have privacy and solitude when conducting certain traditional ceremonial and spiritual activities. We very strongly support this provision of the legislation.

In addition to the careful and sensitive recognition H.R. 5025 accords our treaty and our traditional practices, we are pleased to note that Section 305 fully recognizes the contemporary role that Indian tribes, including our tribe, play in the Mt. Hood National Forest by including tribal representation on the thirteen-member Mt. Hood National Forest Recreational Advisory Council. It is gratifying to be at the table with the State and other local governments, as well as a diverse range of other stakeholders, so that we can all share a collaborative role in shaping the mountain's future.

Beyond the provisions discussed above specific to our 1855 Treaty rights and our sovereign right to carry out traditional Indian cultural and spiritual activities on Mt. Hood National Forest lands, we also support the other provisions of this legislation, including the biomass study. We think this bill provides an excellent balance between the need to protect additional roadless areas through wilderness designation and the need to allow continuing multiple uses of the Mt. Hood National Forest.

For these reasons, I respectfully urge the Subcommittee to pass this legislation and move the bill toward enactment into law.

Thank you.