

WRITTEN TESTIMONY
OF
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SUBCOMMITTEE ON FORESTS AND FOREST HEALTH
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Good morning, Chairman Walden and Members of the House Subcommittee on Forests and Forest Health. My name is Carol York. I am one of five locally elected County Commissioners in Hood River County, Oregon. As a representative of a County with substantial and significant National Forestland within its borders, Hood River County has a vital interest in the management, designation and philosophy of federal land holdings within our County. As such, I am honored to be here today and thank you for the invitation to testify on HR 5025, the Mt. Hood Stewardship Legacy Act.

I appear before you today to comment generally on HR 5025, and especially on several parts of the bill that directly affect land located within Hood River County – one of the three counties directly affected by this land management proposal.

To begin, I want to acknowledge and compliment the Chairman and Representative Blumenauer for the extensive public process they have undertaken in crafting this Mt. Hood bill. Over the last three years, I and other locally elected officials in our County, as well as citizens from throughout our communities have been presented with opportunities to provide suggestions and feedback about various proposed management concepts under consideration in the development of this legislative proposal. We have agreed about some proposals and disagreed about others, but throughout this process we have greatly appreciated the opportunity for dialogue and want to emphasize that we believe HR 5025 reflects many of our most specific interests and concerns. We also want to acknowledge the ongoing dialogue that our County continues to maintain with Senators Wyden and Smith on the issue of Mt. Hood stewardship. We believe that these discussions will eventually lead to a final legislative package that the entire Oregon delegation can enthusiastically endorse. We are pleased to be an active participant in this process.

Land Exchanges and Crystal Springs Watershed:

Within HR 5025, there are two specific land exchanges that we are especially grateful to see included in the bill. One exchange – the Cooper Spur/Government Camp land exchange will resolve a long-standing legal and political battle in Hood River County and help to implement a mediated land settlement agreement painstakingly negotiated among the Hood River Valley Residents Committee, the County, and Mt. Hood Meadows Limited Partnership. In this proposed exchange, approximately 700 acres of privately held land owned on the northeast side of Mt. Hood in Hood River County, will be exchanged for approximately 120 acres of Forest Service land located within the community of Government Camp situated on the west side of the mountain. Efforts to either develop or protect the approximate 700 acres located in Hood River County have been underway for years. By including the Cooper Spur proposal in the legislative package before us, that portion of the Mediated Settlement Agreement on Cooper Spur requiring federal legislation is now moving forward. This is an historic event in our community and all of us involved in this process are grateful to see it included in this Mt. Hood stewardship proposal.

Within the context of contentious land issues on the north and northeast side of the mountain, we were also very pleased to see recognition of Crystal Springs Watershed management issues in the proposed bill. Debate about the future and ecological health of the Crystal Springs Watershed -- the source of clean drinking water for a large percentage of the residents of Hood River County -- was of great concern to us as the discussions about new land management schemes proceeded.

A second land exchange included in HR 5025 is a much smaller, but no less important land exchange in the community of Cascade Locks. Cascade Locks is an economically depressed community located on the extreme western edge of Hood River County. Due to previous federal land management overlays affecting this community – overlays such as the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area which significantly limit development potential in the community – as well as large adjacent Federal land holdings by the Forest Service, and natural boundaries created by the Columbia River on the north and basalt cliffs on the South, this community is faced with very limited land upon which to develop elderly housing or any other type of new mixed use housing options for current or future residents. One parcel that could be developed in the

community is owned by the Port of Cascade Locks, but this 17+ acre parcel is also the exact location of the Pacific Crest Trail as it drops down from the rim of the Gorge and crosses the Columbia River over the Bridge of the Gods. The Port could develop housing within five feet of the trail. However, in an effort to permanently protect and enhance the Pacific Crest Trail, the Port of Cascade Locks has proposed trading this 17 acre parcel for approximately 10 acres of adjacent Forest Service land located within the City's UGB. The Hood River County Commission is particularly pleased to see this proposed land exchange in the proposed legislation since it too represents an opportunity to move forward with a vision that protects a valuable natural resource while providing economic development opportunities in the affected community.

Recreational Use:

Mt. Hood is the second most-scaled mountain in the world. Thousands of visitors, many from the nearby Portland metro area, visit the mountain each year to hike, ski, snowboard, snowshoe, climb, etc. Accessibility impacts that will result from additional levels of protection on federal lands – and perceptions and misperceptions about what those impacts really are, have been of particular interest to the Hood River County Commissioners. While most of the proposed expansion of wilderness areas on Mt. Hood lie in Clackamas as opposed to Hood River County, we have analyzed HR 5025 from the perspective of how additional wilderness designations on the north and east side of the mountain might affect recreational use and users in our County. While we had concerns about some land that was initially considered for inclusion in this bill, we believe that the land now proposed for inclusion as wilderness lands within our County (i.e. Elk Cove/Mazama, Cooper Spur, and Gorge Ridgeline) are appropriate lands for additional protection and we endorse their inclusion in the final bill. Our only point of caution is that the designation of these lands as wilderness may ultimately impact user demands on nearby private and/or county owned recreational lands. While additional non-motorized recreational advocates are likely to be drawn to the new wilderness areas, motorized and mechanized recreational uses may be pushed to private or county owned land and facilities. This potential shift may result in new recreational challenges in our County. As such, we were particularly pleased to see in the legislative proposal language calling for the development of a Recreational Advisory Council. Hood River County would very much like to be an active participant on the Advisory Council. Regardless of the make up of the Council however, we would encourage the Advisory Council to take a comprehensive view of its charge and to consider how its actions and recommendations will affect recreational use on both newly designated wilderness areas as well as on adjacent or nearby privately held or county owned land.

Transportation:

The transportation network that brings people to and from Mt. Hood and safely transports people from place-to-place on the mountain is of vital concern to our County. Highway 35 runs north/south through much of Hood River County and is one of the two main access routes to the Mountain. In May, 2005, Hood River & Clackamas Counties secured designation of significant sections of Highway 35 as well as Highway 26 as the Mt Hood Scenic Byway. We are proud of this designation and were pleased to see that Hwy 35 will not be adversely impacted by the proposed wilderness additions or by wild and scenic river designations in the proposed bill. In fact, if anything, the new management schemes outlined in the bill should attract additional users to the Mt. Hood Scenic Byway. Furthermore, the County strongly supports the call for a new multi-modal transportation plan to serve the traveling needs of the Mt. Hood Region. We are especially pleased to see an emphasis on alternatives to moving recreational users among the key destination resorts on the mountain.

Forest Health:

Hood River County Hood River County owns and manages approximately 30,000 acres of forestland within the boundaries of the County. With an annual allowable cut of 10 Million board feet, the four to five million dollars in annual yield received from the harvesting of this resource represents approximately half of the County's General Fund Revenue. Adjacent or nearby Federal forestlands have been inadequately managed in recent years. This causes the County considerable concern, due to the danger of pest, disease and fire threats from those properties. Regardless of whether the new wilderness designations sought in this bill are designations in Hood River, Multnomah or Clackamas Counties, we remain concerned about the lack of proper forest management on federal properties and we want to emphasize the need to provide adequate resources to the Forest Service so that it can in fact, manage its resources in a way that will not potentially jeopardize timber holdings by other land owners on Mt. Hood.

Gorge Ridgeline:

Finally, I want to also briefly comment on the proposed expansion of the Mark O. Hatfield Wilderness along the ridge line of the Columbia River Gorge. As previously mentioned, development within the City of Cascade Locks is severely constrained by various natural and political constraints. By expanded wilderness designation up to the ridge line, future development

options in Cascade Locks – including projects such as the undergrounding of the Southbank power line – a project that has been actively supported by Members of the Oregon Congressional delegation --- can proceed without confusion or interruption.

Again, I want to express my appreciation for being asked to testify before you today and I want to congratulate the authors of this bill – particularly Representatives Walden and Blumenauer for their thorough, bi-partisan efforts on behalf of their Oregon constituents. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.