

The Walden-Blumenauer Mount Hood Wilderness Bill, HR 5025

HR 5025, Congressmen Walden and Blumenauer's bipartisan legislation to designate Wilderness and Wild and Scenic Rivers around Mount Hood, is a good start. The legislation includes language to implement the Cooper Spur settlement, including undertaking a land trade to divest Meadows Corporation of its holdings on the north side of the mountain, and creating a Crystal Springs Watershed Protection Area. The bill would prevent expansion and development of the Cooper Spur Ski area into a destination resort, and would prevent Meadows Corp. from owning property in Cooper Spur. Additionally, it would designate the areas around Cooper Spur as Wilderness, which would constrain any future owners from expanding the ski area.

HR 5025's Wilderness and Wild and Scenic River designations would create permanent protections for some key areas like Roaring River, Big Bottom, Eagle Creek, Alder Creek, and parts of the Columbia Gorge Wilderness. However, the bill leaves many special places unprotected, including important stands of ancient trees, habitat for birds, fish and animals, and clean clear waters vital for recreation, drinking water, and wildlife.

➤ What HR 5025 protects:

77,500 acres of Wilderness, including

- ❖ Rugged backcountry of Roaring River watershed
- ❖ 1000-year-old cedar trees in Big Bottom
- ❖ Old-growth in Eagle Creek and Alder Creek
- ❖ Additions to the Salmon-Huckleberry Wilderness
- ❖ Cooper Spur and Elk Cove Mazama Mount Hood Wilderness Additions
- ❖ Parts of Bull of the Woods and Columbia Gorge Wilderness Additions

23 miles of Wild and Scenic Rivers, including

- ❖ Parts of Zig Zag WSR, South Fork Clackamas River

➤ HR 5025 leaves many key wildlands and waters unprotected, including:

- ❖ Clackamas Wilderness - Whitewater, scenic lakes, wild salmon and steelhead runs, and rare remnants of lush old-growth forests characterize places like **Memaloose Lake** and **Clackamas Canyon**. The eastside portions of **Bull of the Woods Wilderness additions** are home to salmon and steelhead runs and mature forests.
- ❖ Badger Creek Wilderness Additions - The largest stand of unprotected old-growth in Mt. Hood National Forest at **Boulder Lake**; **Fifteenmile Creek's** diverse landscape and wildlife; and the migration corridor for hawks, eagles, and other birds of prey at **Bonney Butte**.
- ❖ Columbia Gorge Wilderness - Dramatic cliffs, wildflowers, and waterfalls at **Larch Mountain**, the headwaters of Multnomah Falls, one of Oregon's most visited destinations.
- ❖ Mount Hood Wilderness Additions - Protection for Mount Hood's lower slopes would preserve beautiful **Tamanawas Falls** on the mountain's east flank, the wildlife habitat and fish-bearing streams of the lovely **Twin Lakes** area, and Hood River County's watershed at **Marco Creek**, **Lost Lake** and **Lost Lake Butte**.

- ❖ Salmon-Huckleberry Wilderness Additions – These additions will protect **Mirror Lake** and **Hunchback Mountain** from sprawl, development, and logging, as well as preserving the key wetland and fish habitat of the **Salmon River Meadows**.
- ❖ Wild and Scenic Rivers – Beautiful waterways like **Fifteenmile Creek**, the **Oak Grove Fork Clackamas River**, the **East Fork Hood River**, **Fish Creek**, and the **Collawash River** should be safeguarded as Wild and Scenic Rivers.
- ❖ The sole focus on Mount Hood leaves out other areas that deserve protection, such as **Copper Salmon** on the Elk River in Southwest Oregon, **Spring Basin** near the John Day River, and **Soda Mountain** near Ashland. All these proposed wilderness areas enjoy tremendous local support.

Other bill components:

- We applaud the Congressmen on their innovative and positive language that will help the Forest Service to identify unneeded roads and to recommend a potential strategy for their closure and conversion into recreational trails.
- The position on the Recreation Advisory Council reserved for the forest products industry should, in the interest of balance and fairness, be removed. Unlike the groups who represent, horsemen, skiers, hikers, mountain bikers, snowmobilers and hunters and anglers, the forest products industry is not a recreational interest.
- Our organizations are concerned by some of the legislation’s language related to Forest Stewardship. Disease, insects, and fire are part of the forest life cycle, and while they are present in some circumstances on the Mount Hood National Forest, their incidence and scope will fluctuate naturally, and will often be best managed without mechanical restoration techniques. It is important to recognize that while some parts of the Mount Hood National Forest might benefit from active restoration, we should take care not to overstate the severity of naturally occurring pathogens, insect populations or fire risk.
- Similarly, it is critical that when referencing overstocked forests, we differentiate previously logged plantations, which may need some active restoration, from mature and old-growth forests which are naturally fire-resistant and should not be thinned. Restoration efforts should preserve these elements and seek to reintroduce natural fire regimes on the landscape.
- A Forest Stewardship plan should not be created exclusively by the Secretary of Agriculture and the Resources Advisory Committee (RAC), as HR 5025 currently outlines. Instead, a committee composed of local community interests, conservationists, and scientists should have equal standing with the RAC.
- The bill calls for developing plans for transportation, forest stewardship, and recreation. In some cases the legislation specifies a mechanism for public involvement including public meetings and comments periods; this mechanism should be a part of all new plans for the Mount Hood National Forest area.
- We support the sovereign interests of Native American tribes on the Mount Hood National Forests. We urge that priority area management for huckleberry and other first foods be implemented without mechanized thinning wherever possible, in a manner that helps to restore the natural fire regimes of the forest, and does not thin old-growth or mature trees, or impact roadless areas.

- HR 5025 also attempts to assess the biomass production capacity of the Mount Hood National Forest. While conservative biomass utilization that is a by-product of valid forest restoration efforts could be sustainable, we caution that not every acre of forest needs to be actively restored with chainsaws. It is important that a biomass assessment not create a plan to provide more material than the forest can produce without harm to its own regeneration, ecosystem functions, wildlife habitat and watershed health. Habitat elements that are in particularly short supply include large blocks of unroaded forest habitat, mature and old-growth trees, hollow trees and large snags, and healthy streams, rivers, and wetlands.