

NORTHWEST CABLE NEWS

Oregon Sen. Wyden pushes Mount Hood wilderness plan

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AP -- Mt. Hood National Forest

PORTLAND - Oregon Senator Ron Wyden is making a push to expand federal protection for some of Oregon's wilderness areas.

Environmental groups praise the plan, but some say there are other factors to consider.

At a public forum Wednesday night, environmentalists braved "the great indoors" to show their support for Wyden's Lewis and Clark Mount Hood Wilderness Act proposal.

Wyden's plan would set aside 160,000 acres near Mount Hood and the Columbia River Gorge as protected wilderness. It would also protect parts of four rivers that flow down Mount Hood.

Right now, the plan is just a draft, and Wyden will certainly need the support of some Senate Republicans for the wilderness act to have a chance.

"Oregonians don't look at these issues as a partisan way," said Wyden. "I think what they're gonna say is this is a treasure. It's awfully close to the metropolitan area."

"But concurrently you have to have plan for developed recreation, because the people are going to come," said Dave Riley, manager of Mount Hood Meadows Ski Resort.

While Riley told Wyden he supports designating some areas on Mount Hood as wilderness, he says don't be too hasty.

"What the developed areas are going to look like, 10,20, 30 years down the road. In particular the ski areas," said Riley. "I think the ski areas play a huge role in satisfying the demands of people to enjoy their national forests."

If Wyden's plan succeeds, it will be the first new wilderness designation in the Mount Hood area.