

SANDY POST

Wyden proposal protects Sandy's watershed area

Senator calls for addition to Mount Hood wilderness

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by: The Sandy Post Editorial Board

The Sandy City Council will have a work session Monday, April 19, to discuss a proposal lofted by U.S. Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., that would nearly double the wilderness area on the flanks of Mount Hood and along the rim of the Columbia River Gorge.

Wyden's plan was announced Thursday, March 25, and would include increased protection of the headwaters of Multnomah Falls on Larch Mountain and the Alder Creek watershed, which provides drinking water for the city of Sandy.

City Manager Scott Lazenby said Monday, March 29, that the watershed already has protection through agreements with the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service.

The agreements "pretty much have stopped logging" in the watershed, he said, adding the council likely would welcome additional protection.

"There could be benefits there," he said of Wyden's proposal.

Lazenby said the council also wants to ensure Wyden's proposals are not too restrictive. The council will meet 7 p.m. Monday, April 19, at Sandy City Hall.

Wyden's proposal came as news to staff members at Mount Hood National Forest headquarters in Sandy. Kathryn Silverman, deputy forest supervisor, said the office received maps of the proposed new wilderness area

Friday, March 26, and staff members were assessing what types of national forest lands are involved. Geoff Stuckart, a Wyden staff member, said all the lands proposed for wilderness designation are federally owned, most in the national forest and a small portion managed by the Bureau of Land Management. Most are roadless areas.

Wyden titled his plan the "Lewis and Clark Mount Hood Wilderness Act of 2004." He called for bipartisan cooperation in designating 160,000 acres of additional wilderness along the expedition's path in the Columbia River Gorge and in areas surrounding Mount Hood, as a way of lessening the pressures of overuse and staving off threats of development.

In a prepared statement, the senator warned that we are in jeopardy of "loving our wild places to death," citing an instance several years ago when "the Forest Service made a proposal to limit the number of people that could hike the south side of Mount Hood and the public outcry was enormous. Seems to me, rather than tell people that they are going to be restricted from using our public lands, the solution lies in providing more opportunities for them to enjoy our great places."

The proposal seeks a 65,000-acre addition to the Mount Hood Wilderness; 36,200 acres to the Mark O. Hatfield Wilderness that borders the Columbia River Gorge; a 23,600-acre addition to the Badger Creek Wilderness; and a 34,900-acre increase in the Salmon-Huckleberry Wilderness including Alder Creek and Eagle Creek.

It also includes proposals for Wild and Scenic River System designations for 14.9 miles of the East Fork of Hood River, 4.7 miles of the Middle Fork of Hood River, 9 miles of the Zigzag River and 8.3 miles of Eagle Creek.

Historic sites saved would include Civilian Conservation Camp sites on the Zigzag River and the Tilly Jane trail on Mount Hood.

"The plan is a draft. No legislation has been prepared yet," Stuckart said. Wyden said he wanted to pull together the various players at the state and national level to draft legislation in the coming weeks and move it on to Congress.

Wilderness area designation protects fish and wildlife habitat as well as water and forest resources. Such a designation bans logging and eliminates roads or motorized and mechanized vehicles, including mountain bikes, from wilderness areas.

Stuckart said Wyden's office invites telephone calls, letters and e-mails on the subject.

A coalition of Oregon's leading conservation organizations praised Wyden's proposal.

According to Paul Shively of the Sierra Club, Wyden's "proposal is a gift to future generations. Two hundred years from now, people will still have the opportunity to experience a wild Oregon like that experienced by Lewis and Clark.

Oregonians will be forever grateful for this endeavor."

"It's been 20 years since former Senator Hatfield last protected some of the wild lands surrounding Mount Hood.

We are gratified that today Sen. Ron Wyden recognizes the importance of protecting more of Mount Hood and the Columbia Gorge for future generations of Oregonians," said Jay Ward, conservation director of Oregon Natural Resources Council.

Kevin Gorman, executive director of Friends of the Columbia Gorge, said, "Many people assume the beautiful forested cliffs around the gorge waterfalls are safe from logging, but they aren't. Sen. Wyden's proposal protects this national treasure as Wilderness. We encourage other members of Oregon's congressional delegation to join Sen. Wyden and preserve the Columbia Gorge for our children and generations to come."