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# United States Senate

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## **Merkley, Wyden Introduce Legislation to Include Oregon in Smith River National Recreation Area**

*Expansion would protect the Oregon section of the Smith River watershed and its unique plants and wildlife, boost local recreation economy*

Washington, D.C. – Oregon’s U.S. Senators Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden today introduced legislation to expand the Smith River National Recreation Area by [58,000 acres](#), a move that would protect the diverse ecosystems of the rivers, streams, and adjacent lands of the North Fork Smith River watershed and help boost the local fishing and recreation industries that many Oregon families rely on. The legislation is also cosponsored by U.S. Senators Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) and Alex Padilla (D-CA).

In 1990, Congress enacted legislation to establish the Smith River National Recreation Area (NRA) to protect the watershed, but the boundary of the NRA stopped at the Oregon border, leaving the North Fork of the Smith River and its tributaries unprotected.

“When we come together to protect our state’s natural wonders, we can create jobs, protect resources, grow our economy, and make sure future generations of Oregonians can enjoy our incredible public lands,” **Merkley said**. “I’m grateful to have had the partnership of local leaders, conservationists, and businesses as well as my colleagues in creating this legislation expanding the Smith River National Recreation Area—a commonsense win-win for adventurers across the Northwest, those interested in preserving the beautiful places in Oregon, and Southern Oregon’s economy.”

"This legislation has deservedly earned solid bipartisan support in our state, and I'm all in to team up with Senator Merkley on getting this key bill across the finish line for Southern Oregon," **Wyden said**. "Expanding this crucial recreation area would add up to a huge win that protects our state's natural treasures, generates recreation jobs and invests in our local economies for future generations."

The Smith River is home to a rich variety of plants and wildlife—including Coho and Chinook salmon, Coastal Cutthroat trout, the diverse Siskiyou Mountains forests, unique plants found nowhere else on earth, and spectacular redwoods that tower over the lower river banks. The

Smith River NRA's scenic beauty, world-class fisheries, and exceptional water quality attract adventurers who partake in water sports, fishing, hunting, camping, and sightseeing.

The NRA expansion would permanently withdraw the land from new mining claims, helping to protect this sensitive area from proposed nickel strip mines, and protect 74 miles of scenic rivers, including Baldface Creek, Chrome Creek, and nearby streams. In addition, the legislation would task the Forest Service with the preparation of an updated recreation plan identifying specific plans for the entire National Recreation Area, and produce a special study of streams, fens, wetlands, and potentially unstable and vulnerable aquatic habitat areas. The bill complements the Oregon Recreation Enhancement Act and Southwestern Oregon Watershed and Salmon Protection Act, which was introduced by the Senators last Congress to protect the North Fork Smith River watershed and other Southwestern Oregon rivers and streams.

Bill text can be found [here](#).

Bill summary can be found [here](#).

A map of the proposed expansion can be found [here](#).

"I am happy to offer strong support for Senator Merkley's work to expand our beautiful Smith River Watershed as part of our fabulous Wild Rivers Coast," **said Court Boice, Curry County Commissioner**. "The Kalmiopsis Wilderness and Rogue River – Siskiyou National Forest are recognized as the most diverse, wild, unique, rugged and beautiful Landscapes in North America. This legislation will certainly help and is important for maintaining our pristine rivers and recovering the vibrancy of our salmon and steelhead runs."

"I thank Senator Merkley and support his efforts and legislation to expand the Smith River National Recreation Area in Oregon's North Fork of the Smith River watershed," **said David Brock Smith, Oregon State Senator District 01 (R-Port Orford)**. "The Smith River is an important watershed in Southern Oregon and Northern California, providing critical salmonid habitat, drinking water and recreational opportunities, and I will continue to be a strong state partner in supporting the Smith River, its tributaries and the watersheds of Southwest Oregon."

"Expanding the Smith River National Recreation Area and protecting the North Fork lands in Oregon is absolutely the right thing to do," **said Susan Jane Brown, Senior Staff Attorney, Western Environmental Law Center**. "I'm grateful for Senator Merkley's leadership and for the cooperation by many interests to advance this critically important legislation for one of our nation's most spectacular wild rivers."

"The Oregon Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers continues to stand with the sportsmen and women of Oregon for the protection of the wild lands and waters of the State," **said Justin Gindlesperger, SW Regional Director Oregon Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers**. "The expansion of the Smith River National Recreation Area establishes an essential safeguard to the watershed of the Smith River so future generations can

experience a remarkable and truly wild landscape here in Southern Oregon. We appreciate and fully support the effort to protect such a valuable resource.”

“I’ve paddled the North Fork of the Smith in Oregon as well as Baldface Creek and can attest to their distinct values,” **said Zach Collier, Owner/Outfitter, Northwest Rafting Company.** “We fully support any legislation that promotes the permanent protection of these rivers. The North Fork watershed is uniquely special to the world and should be protected as such.”

“The Wild Rivers Coast and rivers like the Smith are legendary among anglers for their steelhead and salmon fisheries,” **said Dean Finnerty, NW Regional Director, Angler’s Conservation Project, Trout Unlimited.** “This region supports a robust sport fishing economy that is vitally important for many rural communities. Sen. Merkley’s bi-partisan Smith River National Recreation Area Expansion Act is a sensible and timely way to honor the sporting heritage of this region and to conserve the cold, clean, fish-filled waters that are the hallmark of this part of America.”

“The Smith River deserves complete protection because state lines are arbitrary to a river,” **said Will Volpert, Indigo Creek Outfitters.** “Oregon is lucky to have a piece of the Smith, as it is truly one of the most majestic and beautiful river systems anywhere. It is a place like no other—with canyon colors beyond vibrant and a terrain that begs to be explored yet is rugged enough to hold most adventurers back. Every time I visit the Smith, it feels like I’m the first person to visit the river canyon in all of history—and that’s a pretty special feeling.”

"Oregon's North Fork Smith watershed is a botanical treasure and should have always been a part of the Smith River National Recreation Area," **said Joseph Vaile, Climate Director of the Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center.** "We thank Senator Merkley for introducing this legislation that will also designate many of the North Fork Smith River's cold-water tributaries as Wild & Scenic. Anyone who has had a chance to explore the remote, primitive backcountry of Oregon's North Fork Smith headwaters knows that it is one of the most spectacular rivers in the world."

“The upper reaches of the Smith River watershed provide exceptional and unique opportunities for backcountry recreation,” **said Thomas O’Keefe, the Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director for American Whitewater.** “We appreciate the leadership of Senator Merkley to expand the Smith River National Recreation Area to include the headwaters in Oregon. The area is characterized by rare hydrologic and botanical resources that the legislation appropriately recognizes. The extension of Wild and Scenic designation to the tributaries of the North Fork Smith will further protect one of the west coast’s last free-flowing rivers and a special place for all who enjoy wild rivers.”

“We have been working to protect the North Fork Smith River’s wild headwaters—keeping its water pristine, protecting fish species’ habitats, and ensuring clean drinking water and outdoor recreation for local communities,” **said Alyssa Babin, founder of Wild and Scenic Rivers in Brookings, Oregon.** “We thank Senator Merkley for his leadership in introducing this bill, and his partnership in working to protect this important watershed.”

"The North Fork Smith is a national treasure, and it always should have been a part of the Smith River National Recreation Area," **said Michael Dotson, executive director of the Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center.** "We are thankful to Senator Merkley for his leadership in protecting one of the most spectacular rivers in the world."

"The expansion of the Smith River National Recreation Area completes a conservation effort initiated over thirty years ago," **said Grant Werschull, Co-Executive Director for Smith River Alliance.** "This action is vitally important to downstream communities and the Smith River as a stronghold for Pacific salmon species."

"The Smith River is recognized as one of the premier salmon strongholds on the West Coast," **said Guido Rahr, President and CEO of the Wild Salmon Center.** "We're grateful to Senators Merkley and Wyden for this investment in wild salmon and the coastal communities that depend on them. Protecting the Smith's cold, clean flows across the entire watershed will secure this place for people and fish for generations to come."

"Senator Merkley's pathbreaking legislation has the potential to conserve Oregon's portion of the incomparable Smith River watershed in Southwest Oregon for this and future generations," **said Andy Kerr of The Larch Company.** "We hope that Congress promptly considers and passes the bill into law."

"The Smith River National Recreation Area Expansion Act is widely supported by local businesses, Chambers of Commerce, local government and we are pleased to join them in recommending its swift passage," **said Pete Jackson, Vice President and General Manager of California Operations.** "Green Diamond Resource Company takes great pride in supporting programs and initiatives that benefit our operating communities --- and this legislation does just that."

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