

## NEWS RELEASE

Jeff Merkley, Senator for Oregon

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### MERKLEY, WYDEN PUSH TO EXPAND SMITH RIVER NATIONAL RECREATION AREA TO INCLUDE OREGON

Washington, D.C. – Oregon's U.S. Senators Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden today introduced the *Smith River National Recreation Area Expansion Act*, legislation to expand the Smith River National Recreation Area by 58,000 acres. This legislation is critical to 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 Oregonians rely on. This legislation is also cosponsored by California's U.S. Senators Alex Padilla and Adam Schiff.

**"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 supporting 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."**

**"Expanding the Smith River National Recreation Area would protect one of our state's most iconic treasures and generate both recreation jobs and economic benefits for Southern Oregon from visitors eager to fish, hunt, camp and hike in the area," Wyden said. "The fact that this legislation has secured such broad-based support in Oregon reflects its many benefits, and I'm all in to get this bill across the finish line."**

**"Renowned for its whitewater creeks, hiking trails, and vital salmon and steelhead populations, the Smith River is a West Coast treasure," Padilla said. "This effort to expand the Smith River National Recreation Area is crucial to protect our state's only free-flowing major river system, bolstering the essential fishing and recreation industries in both California and Oregon."**

**"The expansion of the Smith River to include Oregon's North Fork watershed will not only enable us to preserve a valuable resource but will help boost economic growth. The river is a natural treasure to Oregon and Northern California and this legislation will benefit future generations, expand recreational opportunities, and protect the rich biodiversity," Schiff said.**

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.

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 Oregon's many recreational opportunities.

The NRA expansion would protect 74 miles of scenic rivers, including Baldface Creek, Chrome Creek, and nearby streams and permanently withdraw the land from new mining claims. Additionally, the legislation would task the U.S. 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*, which was introduced by the Senators last week to protect the North Fork Smith River watershed and other Southwestern Oregon rivers and streams.

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

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

**"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. This is not a partisan issue and I will continue to be a strong state partner in supporting the Smith River, its tributaries and the watersheds of Southwest Oregon."**

**"I am proud to support Senator Merkley's initiative to expand the stunning Smith River Watershed, an integral part of our incredible Wild Rivers Coast," stated Court Boice, Oregon State Representative District 01 (R-Gold Beach). "The Kalmiopsis Wilderness and Rogue River – Siskiyou National Forest boast some of the most diverse, breathtaking, and untamed landscapes in North America. This legislation is crucial not only for preserving our pristine rivers but also for revitalizing our vital salmon and steelhead populations."**

**"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."**

**"On behalf of the 340 businesses we represent as well as multiple partner Chambers of Commerce in our bioregion, we thank Senator Merkley for his leadership and assistance," said Cindy Vosburg, Executive Director of the Crescent City-Del Norte County Chamber of Commerce. "This forward-looking legislation helps ensure our community will continue to have high quality drinking water and one of the cleanest rivers in the USA. This is very important to our community and our travel and tourism-based economy."**

**“The Smith River watershed provides a wide variety of outdoor activities in a unique landscape including hunting, fishing, rafting, swimming, hiking, and camping,” said Justin Gindlesperger, Southwest Regional Director for the Oregon Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers. “The expansion of the Smith River National Recreation Area would provide an essential safeguard to the watershed so future generations can experience a remarkable and truly wild landscape here in Southwest Oregon. The Oregon Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers continues to stand with the sportsmen and women of Oregon for the protection of the wild lands and waters of the State and we fully support the effort to protect such a valuable resource.”**

**“The value of the Smith River lies in its fisheries and the headwaters which support them,” said James Fraser, Oregon Policy Director, Trout Unlimited. “Fishing and hunting is a huge part of the rural economy in southwest Oregon. This bill safeguards those opportunities and the resources that hunters and anglers depend upon.”**

**“The upper Smith River watershed offers special opportunities for backcountry recreation of all kinds,” said Clinton Begley, Executive Director of American Whitewater. “We’re grateful for Senator Merkley’s leadership in working to protect this irreplaceable landscape and recognize its unique significance. Expanding the Smith River National Recreation Area in Oregon and extending Wild and Scenic designation to the North Fork Smith’s tributaries will help keep one of the West Coast’s last free-flowing rivers wild and free for generations to come.”**

**“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, Principal, Silvix Resources. “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 river.”**

**“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 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.”**

**“The North Fork Smith is a national and botanical 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 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.”**

**“The Smith River is one of the most exceptional wild rivers on the west coast, offering world-class recreation and conservation benefits. Expanding the Smith River National Recreation Area to include its Oregon headwaters is a common-sense step to support exceptional outdoor opportunities and the communities that rely on them. We applaud Senator Merkley and Senator Wyden for their leadership in protecting this remarkable landscape for future generations,” said Louis Geltman, Vice President for Policy and Government Relations, Outdoor Alliance.**

**“We’ve worked for years with local communities to improve protection of the North Fork Smith River. From its pristine drinking water for downstream communities, outdoor recreation opportunities for locals, and the growing travel and tourism industry, this area has it all,” said David Moryc, with American Rivers. “We thank Senator Merkley for his leadership to protect Oregon’s most valuable natural assets.”**

**"Our coastal region is known as America's Wild Rivers Coast — and for good reason," said Marie Curtis, Curry County Chamber of Commerce. "Our rivers and streams supply drinking water, support salmon and other fisheries---- as well as the many recreation activities our residents and visitors hold dear."**