

**Statement of
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Bureau of Land Management
Department of the Interior
Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests
S. 766, Devil's Staircase Wilderness Act
May 18, 2011**

Thank you for inviting the Department of the Interior to testify on S. 766, the Devil's Staircase Wilderness Act of 2011. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) supports S. 766 as it applies to lands we manage.

Background

The proposed Devil's Staircase Wilderness, near the coast of southwestern Oregon, is not for the faint of heart. Mostly wild land and difficult to access, the Devil's Staircase reminds us of what much of this land looked like hundreds of years ago. A multi-storied forest of Douglas fir and western hemlock towers over underbrush of giant ferns, providing critical habitat for the threatened Northern Spotted Owl and Marbled Murrelet. The remote and rugged nature of this area provides a truly wild experience for any hiker.

S. 766

S. 766 proposes to designate over 30,000 acres as wilderness, as well as portions of both Franklin Creek and Wasson Creek as components of the Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The majority of these designations are on lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service. The Department of the Interior defers to the U.S. Department of Agriculture on those designations.

Approximately 6,830 acres of the proposed Devil's Staircase Wilderness and 4.2 miles of the Wasson Creek proposed designation are within lands managed by the BLM. The Department of the Interior supports these designations.

We note that while the vast majority of the acres proposed for designation are Oregon & California (O&C) lands, identified under the 1937 O&C Lands Act for timber production, the BLM currently restricts timber production on these lands. These lands are administratively withdrawn from timber production by the BLM through various administrative classifications. Additionally, the BLM estimates that nearly 90 percent of the area proposed for designation is comprised of forest stands that are over 100 years old, and provides critical habitat for the threatened Marbled Murrelet and Northern Spotted Owl.

The 4.2 miles of Wasson Creek would be designated as a wild river to be managed by the BLM under S. 766. The majority of the acres protected through this designation would be within the proposed Devil's Staircase wilderness designation, though 376 acres would be outside the proposed wilderness on adjacent BLM lands.

The designations identified on BLM-managed lands under S. 766 would result in only minor modification of current management of the area and would preserve these wild lands for future generations.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of these important Oregon designations. The Department of the Interior looks forward to welcoming these units into the BLM's National Landscape Conservation System.