

**Statement of
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Department of the Interior
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests
S. 2001, Rogue Wilderness Area Expansion act
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Thank you for inviting the Department of the Interior to testify on S. 2001, which would expand the existing Wild Rogue Wilderness by nearly 60,000 acres and extend the existing Rogue Wild and Scenic River by designating an additional 35 Rogue River tributaries to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The Department supports S. 2001, and would welcome the opportunity to work with the Committee and the members of the Oregon delegation on modifications to the bill to improve manageability.

Additional protection for the Rogue River was highlighted in Secretary Salazar's November 2011 Preliminary Report to Congress on BLM Lands Deserving Protection as National Conservation Areas, Wilderness or Other Conservation Designations. S. 2001 has wide support at state and local levels, as well as from a wide range of local citizens and stakeholders. It is a wonderful example of how people can come together to propose protection of such a beautiful and dramatic area.

Background

The Rogue River's headwaters begin near Crater Lake. It then rushes 215 miles through the mountains and valleys of southwestern Oregon, eventually emptying into the Pacific Ocean near the town of Gold Beach. Over millions of years, the Rogue has patiently carved its way through western Oregon's mountains creating 3,000 foot canyons, rugged valleys and inspiring scenery. Dense, old-growth forests flank the Rogue providing habitat for older forest-dependent species, including the Northern Spotted Owl and the Marbled Murrelet. The cold, clear waters of the river provide a home for Pacific salmon, steelhead trout, and green sturgeon.

Recreationists are drawn to the entire Rogue River watershed to experience nature in a multitude of ways. These recreationists are a critical economic engine for local economies and include commercial and sport fishing, rafting and jet boat tours, and hiking and backpacking. The untamed landscape offers countless opportunities for challenge, exploration, and discovery.

The 36,000-acre Wild Rogue Wilderness was designated by an Act of Congress (Public Law 95-237) in 1978. Located primarily on lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service, the Wild Rogue includes approximately 8,600 acres of lands administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). In 1968, Congress passed the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (Public Law 90-542), establishing the Wild and Scenic River System and designating eight original rivers. As one of these initial eight rivers, Oregon's Rogue River has long been recognized for its beauty, exceptional recreational opportunities and extraordinary resource values.

For several years, Senator Wyden and other members of the Oregon Congressional delegation have worked with local stakeholders, governments, recreationists, and the conservation community to enhance protections of the Rogue River watershed. S. 2001 is a result of those concerted efforts.

S. 2001

S. 2001 proposes to enlarge the existing Wild Rogue Wilderness by adding nearly 60,000 acres of land administered by the BLM. The bill also extends the existing Rogue Wild and Scenic River by adding 93 miles of 35 tributaries of the Rogue to the wild and scenic river system. In addition, the bill withdraws 50 miles of 20 other Rogue River tributaries from operation of the land laws, mining laws, and mineral leasing laws, and prohibits the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) from licensing new water resource projects and associated facilities along these tributaries.

The BLM supports the expansion of the Wild Rogue Wilderness as provided by S. 2001. This wild and rugged area is largely untrammled. It has retained its primeval character and has been influenced primarily by the forces of nature, with outstanding opportunities for primitive recreation or solitude. Protection of these wilderness characteristics is largely consistent with the current management framework for these lands. We would like the opportunity to work with the bill sponsor and the Committee on some modifications to the map and the legislation.

The BLM also recommends that the legislation include language directing the Secretary of the Interior to manage the BLM portion of the current Wild Rogue Wilderness. When the Wild Rogue Wilderness was established in 1978, the legislation called for the Secretary of Agriculture to manage all of the lands within the wilderness boundary. With this expansion we would like to correct that previous oversight and ensure that both the original and the additional BLM-managed lands within the Wild Rogue are managed by the BLM. Management of this area would be a cooperative exercise with the U. S. Forest Service and involve many of the same staff that jointly manage the Rogue's successful river program.

The bill excludes over 500 acres of BLM-managed lands on the north side of the river within the external boundaries of the wilderness addition from designation as wilderness. This could leave these lands open to future development and potentially complicate management of the surrounding lands as wilderness. These lands show visible effects of past logging activities and existing primitive roads that do not meet the naturalness criteria of the Wilderness Act. The BLM would like to discuss the possibility of designating them as "potential wilderness" (as was done, for example, to California's Elkhorn Ridge Potential Wilderness Area through the Northern California Coastal Wild Heritage Wilderness Act – Public Law 109-362). If these lands were to be actively or passively restored to wilderness conditions in the future, they could then be formally added to the Wild Rogue Wilderness.

The BLM would also like to work with the Oregon delegation on boundary modifications of the wilderness expansion to improve manageability. There are portions of the proposed wilderness where minor modifications to follow a road would allow for a more recognizable and manageable boundary. In addition, a few areas identified for wilderness designation on the southeast side of the proposed expansion may raise manageability concerns. Specifically, the

inclusion of areas south of Bailey Creek and east of the Rogue appears to present conflicts with existing uses. The BLM would like the opportunity to discuss these conflicts further with the Committee and the bill's sponsor.

In 1968, when Congress established the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, it designated the Rogue as one of the original eight rivers included in this system. Section two of S. 2001 further enhances that initial designation by adding specific tributaries of the Rogue to the national system, thus conserving the greater Rogue River watershed. In general, the proposed stream segments are located in steep sloped canyons with mature and structurally complex forest stands that have high conservation values. We support maintaining and enhancing those conservation values through this designation.

Finally, S. 2001 (Section 5) prohibits FERC from licensing the construction of any new water or power projects along 50 miles of 20 Rogue River tributaries. Additionally, the bill would withdraw land for one-quarter mile along either side of these tributaries from operation of the land laws, mining laws and mineral leasing laws. This withdrawal will protect valid existing rights but would prohibit the sale or exchange of any of these federal lands; the location of new mining claims; new mineral or geothermal leases; and sales of mineral materials. These withdrawals will provide additional protections to this important watershed, and the Department supports these provisions.

Conclusion

One of the earliest masters of the American western novel, Zane Grey, proclaimed the historic beauty of this area, and made it his home. "The happiest lot of any angler" wrote Grey "would be to live somewhere along the banks of the Rogue River, most beautiful stream of Oregon."

S. 2001 seeks to preserve and protect the beauty Zane Grey saw for generations to come. This bill is the product of many years of discussions and collaboration with the local community, stakeholders, and other interested parties by the Oregon Congressional delegation and we would like to be part of those continuing discussions. The Department urges swift passage of S. 2001 and looks forward to welcoming these important conservation additions into the BLM's National Landscape Conservation System.