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## Wyden and Merkley Introduce Legislation to Protect 4,700 Miles of Oregon Rivers Nominated by Nearly 2,500 Oregonians

River Democracy Act introduced after years-long public process led by Wyden allowing Oregonians to submit their favorite rivers and streams to be considered for inclusion in legislation

*Washington, D.C.* – U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley today introduced the *River Democracy Act* to add nearly 4,700 miles of rivers and streams in Oregon to the national Wild and Scenic Rivers system – the largest Wild and Scenic Rivers effort in our nation's history.

Those named rivers and streams were among more than 15,000 nominations submitted by 2,500 Oregonians as part of [Wyden's statewide public effort](#) to protect more of Oregon's waterways and reduce catastrophic wildfire risks, improve drinking water and expand recreation access to boost rural jobs and economies.

Wyden said he looked forward to keeping the public process going and to continue getting feedback as he and Merkley work to get the *River Democracy Act* through Congress.

**“Rivers and streams are Oregon’s lifeblood, providing clean drinking water for our families, sustaining our thriving outdoor recreation economy, and nurturing the quality of life that brings new investments, businesses and jobs to our state,”** Wyden said. **“Oregonians made it loud and clear: they**

**cherish Oregon’s rivers and want them protected for generations to come. More protected rivers and clear management objectives means more jobs, improved wildfire resiliency and a guarantee for the livability of Oregon. The *River Democracy Act* represents the best of the Oregon Way, and I looked forward to continuing the conversation with our neighbors.”**

**“Our rivers and streams are some of the most special natural treasures Oregon has to offer, and have always been integral to the health and vitality of our communities and rural economies,” said Merkley. “By expanding Wild and Scenic designations, we can protect the health of these delicate ecosystems and strengthen access to high-quality drinking water, all while increasing wildfire resilience, bolstering our recreation economy, and ensuring that generations of Oregonians to come can enjoy the magic of our waters.”**

The *River Democracy Act* builds on legislation Congress passed in 2019 that added more than 250 miles of Wild and Scenic rivers in Oregon. The state now has 2,173 miles designated in the Wild and Scenic Rivers system, but that total remains only a small fraction of Oregon’s 110,994 miles of rivers and streams.

Oregon’s rivers and streams fuel outdoor recreation, an economic engine in Oregon. According to the Outdoor Recreation Industry, outdoor recreation supports 224,000 jobs and generates \$15.6 billion in consumer spending.

*The River Democracy Act:*

- Designates nearly 4,700 miles of rivers in all corners of Oregon as “Wild and Scenic Rivers” to expand recreation access and boost local economies,

protect drinking water for families, reduce wildfire threats, and sustain endangered fish and wildlife species;

- Requires federal land managers to assess wildfire risks in Wild and Scenic River corridors, implement a plan to reduce wildfire risks to homes and businesses near Wild and Scenic Rivers, assist local governments mitigate wildfire risks and restore water quality should a fire strike near a Wild and Scenic River;
- Encourages federal land managers to develop river management plans in collaboration with Native American tribes and ensures Native American tribes have a voice in how rivers are managed; and
- Ensures that only federal lands are affected by Wild and Scenic designations, while protecting private property rights, water rights and existing permits and rights of way on federal lands.

A one-page summary of the legislation can be found [here](#).

A section-by-section summary of the legislation can be found [here](#).

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

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

Here's a sampling of what Oregonians are saying about Wyden's *River Democracy Act*:

**Representative Pam Marsh, Oregon House District 5:** "Healthy clean rivers are the essence of my district. Whether you're floating down the world renowned Rogue River or hiking along Jenny Creek, rivers in my district provide clean drinking water to our communities, offer recreational outlets for all, entice visitors who support our local businesses, and give us solace to play, heal, and teach. I thank Senator Wyden for his leadership on the River Democracy Act of 2021, and in protecting Oregon's most precious resource – our waters."

**Dan Courtney, Chairman, Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Tribe of Indians:** “The Cow Creek Umpqua People have lived on the land and fished our waters since time immemorial. Our people have suffered through Removal, Termination and finally restored to manage our forests once again. We applaud Senator Wyden for including elements of management in his Wild and Scenic legislation that consider the sobering risks that wildfire poses to our river corridors. Careful management around our rivers is necessary to maintain good drinking water, healthy fish runs and the beauty that our rivers offer to us and our guests.”

**Liz Hamilton, Executive Director, Northwest Sportfishing Industry Association:** “Wild and scenic rivers are at the heart of Oregon’s natural healing beauty they have been part of our family vacations for generations. Hunting, fishing, rafting and camping along the miles of breathtaking, protected rivers, we forged priceless family memories that will stay with us—forever. By expanding protections for rivers, Senator Wyden is safeguarding one of our state’s most valuable resources and also protecting the future of Oregon’s outdoor recreation industry.”

**Zac Kauffman, Owner, Sawyer Paddles & Oars:** “The Rogue was one of the original eight rivers designated as Wild & Scenic in 1968 and is a huge economic driver for our company, its employees and the Southern Oregon region. People from across the country and the globe come here to enjoy Oregon’s fishing and paddling opportunities and our business relies directly on the health of the river for these opportunities. River-based recreation on the Rogue River alone accounts for more than \$30 million in total economic output. Sawyer Paddles and Oars supports Senator Ron Wyden’s bill to protect some of Oregon’s most treasured rivers as Wild and Scenic Rivers with its broad support from small

business owners like myself, water-sports enthusiasts and other community members who all depend on these waterways.”

**Chad Brown, U.S. Navy Veteran, Founder & President, Soul River**

**Inc.:** “Senator Wyden’s leadership to champion and protect Oregon’s rivers is an affirmative action! A warrior mission for veterans and our next generation to have the opportunity to benefit from what nature provides our souls. Thank you, Senator Wyden for your strength to protect Oregon’s Wild and Scenic Rivers for us all.”

**Mike Higgins, Farmer and retired Junior and High School Science Teacher,**

**Halfway, Ore.:** “As a fifth-generation eastern Oregonian I’m a strong supporter of Oregon’s clean wild rivers. My great-great-grandparents came to the Burnt River Valley in 1863 and I grew up in a small town south of Baker City – Hereford. I spent the majority of my youth roaming the hills, fishing the streams and hunting throughout the region. I applaud Senator Wyden for his leadership and vision in thinking about protecting our clean drinking water sources and the lifeblood of our wildlands as wild and scenic rivers. This is a gift to our children and their children for generations to come.”

More statements in support of the *River Democracy Act* can be found [here](#).