



October 18, 2021

To: [fortherecord@energy.senate.gov](mailto:fortherecord@energy.senate.gov)

Re: Testimony in support of the S. 1538, The Smith River National Recreation Area Expansion Act.

To:

The Honorable Joe Manchin

Chairman

Energy and Natural Resources Committee

United States Senate

304 Dirksen Senate Office Building

Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable John Barrasso

Ranking Member

Energy and Natural Resources Committee

United States Senate

304 Dirksen Senate Office Building

Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Manchin and Ranking Member Barrasso,

Our organization supports the conservation of the Smith River through the proposed S. 1538, the Smith River National Recreation Area Expansion Act. The Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center (KS Wild) is a regional wildlife and wildlands conservation organization with over 3,000 annual contributors and more than 10,000 supporters, with a vast majority based in southwest Oregon and northwest California.

The history of support for this legislation is long, as it was first proposed for conservation in 1990 when the Smith River National Recreation Area legislation

passed Congress. While the Oregon portion of the watershed was left out of the bill, there is unanimity that the Smith River headwaters in Oregon are deserving of recognition and protection. More recently, tens of thousands of people responded to a project proposal that would have authorized mining in the headwaters of the North Fork Smith, with overwhelming local and regional opposition to the mining plans. Local municipalities, elected officials, and public health stewards all were opposed to the proposed nickel strip mine.

Recreation in southwest Oregon is rapidly expanding and communities are looking to shift away from the boom-and-bust cycle of resource extraction. In recent years, more people are coming to visit public lands and wild rivers in southwest Oregon, but the land management agencies are struggling to keep up with maintenance of recreational sites, campgrounds, and trailheads. As part of an expanded National Recreation Area, destinations such as the Packsaddle Trailhead and Sourdough Camp could benefit from improvements in maintenance, accessibility and sustainability.

The expansion of the National Recreation Area into Oregon's North Fork watershed would also ensure that a 20-year mineral withdrawal in the basin is made permanent. Thereby, protecting water quality and essential wild salmon/steelhead populations. In addition, our organization also supports the bill's provisions for designating tributaries of the North Fork Smith River as Wild & Scenic. This watershed and its streams were designated the first "Outstanding resource Water in the Pacific Northwest, confirmation that it has some of the best water quality anywhere in the lower 48 states.

Oregon's North Fork Smith watershed is largely a roadless area with unique serpentine geology and is part of the greater Kalmiopsis region where there exist rare plants found nowhere else in the world. We support this legislation which maintains the biodiversity and botanical resources, and we hope to see future and additional investments in the watershed where the streamside Port Orford Cedar forest stands provide shade for headwater fisheries. This important riparian tree species is threatened by a non-native root disease which can be spread by unmanaged wet weather OHV use. This disease and its potential impacts to Port Orford Cedar is a significant issue and concern for us.

We are encouraged by the inclusion of inventories for wetlands, fens, plants (including the Port Orford Cedar), fungi and other biota that can help assess future conservation, restoration, and mitigation priorities. The Port Orford Cedar is a species of concern for both forest advocates and aquatic restoration specialists, and we believe this legislation presents an opportunity to recognize the overlapping aquatic, botanical and recreational values that these rare streamside conifers

provide. By protecting and retaining riparian Port Orford Cedar stands we protect salmon, steelhead, water quality, and the scenic values of the Smith River watershed.

Thank you for advancing this important piece of legislation.

For the Wild,

s/ Michael Dotson  
Executive Director, Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center  
Ashland, OR 97520