

**STATEMENT OF  
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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
BEFORE THE  
UNITED STATES SENATE  
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES  
SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC LANDS, FORESTS AND MINING  
CONCERNING**

**S. 1699, Oregon Wildlands Act**

**APRIL 21, 2016**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present the views of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) regarding S. 1699, the Oregon Wildlands Act.

Wild & Scenic River Designations

Section 202(a) amends the existing designation in Section 3(a)(69) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to change the starting and ending points of the three main segments of the Chetco River consistent with the Siskiyou National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. The total length of the Chetco Wild and Scenic River would remain 44.5 miles. In addition, this amendment would effectuate a mineral withdrawal of the Federal land within the boundary of the segments of the Chetco River designated as a wild and scenic river. Typically under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, only Federal lands within segments designated as wild are subject to a mineral withdrawal. The Department is supportive of these technical changes as they provide a more appropriate naming convention, and better reflect management classifications and direction for the Chetco River.

Section 202(b) officially changes the name of “Squaw Creek” to “Whychus Creek” to better reflect local usage, current geographic nomenclature standards, and the name change approved by the U.S. Board on Geographic Names in 2005. This section also updates the location description in the existing designation in section 3(a)(102) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act to incorporate several other name changes. The Department strongly supports this much-needed technical correction to remove the offensive name of the designations.

Section 203 would designate approximately 10.4 miles of streams on National Forest System lands as part of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System: 5.9 miles of Wasson Creek and 4.5 miles of Franklin Creek, both on the Siuslaw National Forest. The Department defers to the Department of the Interior in regard to the proposal to designate the 4.2-mile segment of Wasson Creek flowing on lands administered by BLM.

The Forest Service conducted an evaluation of the Wasson and Franklin Creeks to determine their eligibility for wild and scenic river designation as part of the forest planning process for the Siuslaw National Forest. However, the Agency has not conducted a wild and scenic river suitability study, which provides the basis for determining whether to recommend a river as an addition to the National System. Wasson Creek was found eligible as it is both free-flowing and possesses outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational and ecological values. The Department supports designation of the 1.7 miles of the Wasson Creek on NFS lands based on the segment’s eligibility. At the time of the evaluation in 1990, Franklin Creek, although free flowing, was found not to possess river-related values significant at a regional or national scale and was therefore determined ineligible for designation. However, the Department does not oppose Franklin Creek’s designation. We would also like to work with the Subcommittee on some potential amendments and map revisions that we believe would improve this section of the bill.

Section 205(a) would amend the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act by adding additional segments in the Elk River watershed to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System on the Siskiyou National Forest. These additions would increase the Elk’s designated wild and scenic river mileage from approximately 29 miles to 63.4 miles. The Department takes no position on these additional

designated segments. None of the additional segments are currently identified as eligible or suitable for wild and scenic river designation under the 1989 Siskiyou National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. However, the Department would be happy to work with the Subcommittee to provide additional relevant information concerning the Elk River segments identified in this bill.

### Wilderness Designations

Section 301 of the bill would designate 56,100 acres managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and by the Forest Service as an addition to the Wild Rogue Wilderness. The Department supports this addition of wilderness on National Forest System and has testified in July 2015 in support of S. 132, the Oregon and California Land Grant Act of 2015 that also would make this designation.

Section 301(b) would expand the Wild Rogue Wilderness in Oregon by designating 56,100 acres of land currently managed by the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service as wilderness. The “Proposed USFS Wilderness” identified in this section and on the referenced “Wild Rogue Wilderness Additions” map is located along a “cherry stem” into the existing wilderness area. The “cherry stem” originally allowed for the existence of a Level II Forest System Road, part of the designated “Grave Creek to Marial Back Country Byway,” and the continuation of the Marial Lodge, a permitted resort. Marial Lodge accommodates hikers in the spring, rafters through the summer and commercial fishing trips in the fall. Proposed boundary adjustments in this area appear to be consistent with the continuation of the present and current use of the existing facilities.

Section 301(b)(1)(A) also includes language that turns back administration of a portion of the existing Wild Rogue Wilderness from Forest Service to BLM management. The Forest Service is currently authorized to manage this BLM area through a Memorandum of Understanding. The Department does not see any issues of concern related to management of this expanded Wilderness area. However, the Department would like to work with the committee to develop a

detailed "inset map" in the legislation to ensure that the boundaries between BLM and USFS parcels are clear and unambiguous.

Section 302 would designate the Devil's Staircase Wilderness (30,540 acres) on lands managed by the Forest Service and BLM surrounding Wasson Creek. Approximately 24,000 acres of this wilderness would be on the Siuslaw National Forest. There is an existing road within the proposed boundary of this wilderness that would require decommissioning by heavy equipment prior to designation. Section 302(h) of the bill also would effectuate the transfer of administrative jurisdiction of an approximately 49 acre parcel managed by BLM to the Forest Service to be managed as part of the Siuslaw National Forest. This parcel includes a site of cultural significance to the Coos, Lower Umpqua, and Siuslaw Indians. The Department supports this designation.

Section 302(b) would designate an area known as the "Devil's Staircase" as wilderness under the National Wilderness Preservation System. The proposed wilderness encompasses approximately 30,540 acres of NFS and BLM lands. Approximately 7,800 acres of the NFS lands are within the Wasson Creek Undeveloped Area under the Forest Plan for the Siuslaw National Forest and were evaluated for wilderness characteristics in the 1990 Siuslaw National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan. The proposed Devil's Staircase Wilderness provides an outstanding representation of the Oregon Coast Range and would enhance the National Wilderness Preservation System. There is an existing road within the proposed boundary of this wilderness that would require decommissioning by heavy equipment prior to designation as wilderness or allowance for use of mechanized equipment for this purpose after the enactment. The Department supports the designation of the proposed Devil's Staircase Wilderness.

Other portions of this bill would designate additional BLM lands and rivers flowing on BLM lands and would be administered by the Secretary of the Interior. Therefore, the Department defers to Department of the Interior on these proposed designations.

This concludes my remarks on the Oregon Wildlands Act. I would be happy to answer any questions. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.