

OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

May 10, 2022

Rep. Joe Neguse

Chair, Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands

1419 Longworth House Office Building

Washington, D.C. 20515

Rep. Russ Fulcher

Ranking Member, Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands

1520 Longworth House Office Building

Washington, DC 20515

Re: May 11 National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands legislative hearing

Dear Chair Neguse and Ranking Member Fulcher,

On behalf of the human powered outdoor recreation community, thank you for holding May 11th's legislative hearing to consider bills of significance for outdoor recreation on our country's public lands and waters. We strongly support the Roadless Area Conservation Act, the Smith River National Recreation Area Expansion Act, and the Mt. Hood and Columbia River Gorge Recreation Enhancement and Conservation Act.

Outdoor Alliance is a coalition of ten member-based organizations representing the human powered outdoor recreation community. The coalition includes Access Fund, American Canoe Association, American Whitewater, International Mountain Bicycling Association, Winter Wildlands Alliance, The Mountaineers, the American Alpine Club, the Mazamas, Colorado Mountain Club, and Surfrider Foundation and represents the interests of the millions of Americans who climb, paddle, mountain bike, backcountry ski and snowshoe, and enjoy coastal recreation on our nation's public lands, waters, and snowscapes.

Roadless Areas Conservation Act of 2021 (H.R. 279)

Outdoor Alliance strongly supports the Roadless Areas Conservation Act, which would codify and make permanent the USDA Forest Service 2001 Roadless Rule, a



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critically important policy for the outdoor recreation community. For the past 20 years, the Roadless Rule has served its intended purpose of protecting the last remaining undeveloped areas of the National Forest System for the irreplaceable ecological, cultural, and recreational values that they provide. Congress should strengthen these protections by passing H.R. 279.

The Roadless Rule is an important conservation tool that protects many of our most valued backcountry recreation areas. The Roadless Rule was established in 2001 after enormous public outreach and was intended to “provide lasting protection in the context of multiple-use management” for the 60 million acres of roadless areas on our National Forests and Grasslands. It is fundamentally important that some areas of our Forests and Grasslands—including many areas invaluable for outdoor recreation—are protected as roadless areas.

Our community values these areas for the opportunities they provide for climbing, hiking, mountain biking, paddling, and backcountry skiing. Roadless areas are found in 42 states and Puerto Rico, and they are home to recreation gems like:

- The Pacific Crest Trail, which passes through several roadless areas in the Cascades and Sierras on the West Coast;
- Alpine summits like Wyoming’s Franc’s Peak;
- Montana’s Hyalite Canyon, a world-renowned ice climbing destination;
- Climbing and backcountry skiing at Washington Pass and Liberty Bell at the Headwaters of Washington’s Methow Valley;
- Mountain biking on the Maah Daah Hey Trail in western North Dakota, Kettle Crest of Washington, and Tea Creek Mountain in West Virginia;
- Stellar hiking and camping adjacent to the Dolly Sods and Otter Creek Wilderness in West Virginia; and
- Paddling in the headwaters of the Gauley in the West Virginia Highlands and headwaters of the Lochsa in Idaho.

These areas and many others provide invaluable opportunities for recreationists to challenge themselves and experience the outdoors in undeveloped backcountry settings that are rare across America’s public lands. The Roadless Rule includes clear management direction that protects this recreational experience, but also



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provides for flexibility in allowing a variety of recreational uses. This includes mechanized uses like mountain biking that are not permissible in Wilderness areas.

Importantly, the Roadless Rule allows for effective wildfire management, including fire mitigation actions like prescribed fire and mechanical removal of small-diameter trees where ecologically appropriate. Fire suppression activities are not circumscribed by the Roadless Rule, and fire managers are able to take actions needed to protect communities in the event of a wildfire. Human-caused ignitions are less likely in roadless areas than in developed areas, and preventing new road construction in these areas can help to limit possible new ignition sources. Additionally, research shows that forests in roadless areas, which in many cases have been less disrupted by fire suppression over the past century, may be more resilient to climate change.¹

Outdoor Alliance’s GIS Lab has analyzed GIS data regarding the overlap between Inventoried Roadless Areas (IRAs) and outdoor recreation opportunities in 12 western states. In these states, IRAs include more than 17,000 miles of non-motorized trails, more than 500 river miles of whitewater paddling, more than 5000 rock climbing routes, and more than 1.2 million acres of backcountry skiing. These statistics emphasize how singularly important these protections are for our community

In recent years, our community has weighed in on multiple proposals to weaken the Roadless Rule, including efforts to roll back protections in Utah and Alaska. These efforts and others underscore the need for permanent protections from Congress to ensure that roadless areas remain undeveloped for present and future generations. H.R. 279 would accomplish that important goal, and we strongly support its passage in the 117th Congress.

Smith River National Recreation Area Expansion Act (H.R. 7329)

Outdoor Alliance strongly supports the Smith River National Recreation Area Expansion Act. This legislation will protect the North Fork Smith River headwaters

¹ James D. Johnston, John B. Kilbride, Garrett W. Meigs, Christopher J. Dunn, and Robert E. Kennedy, *Does conserving roadless wildland increase wildfire activity in western US national forests?*, 16 Environmental Research Letters 084040 (2021).



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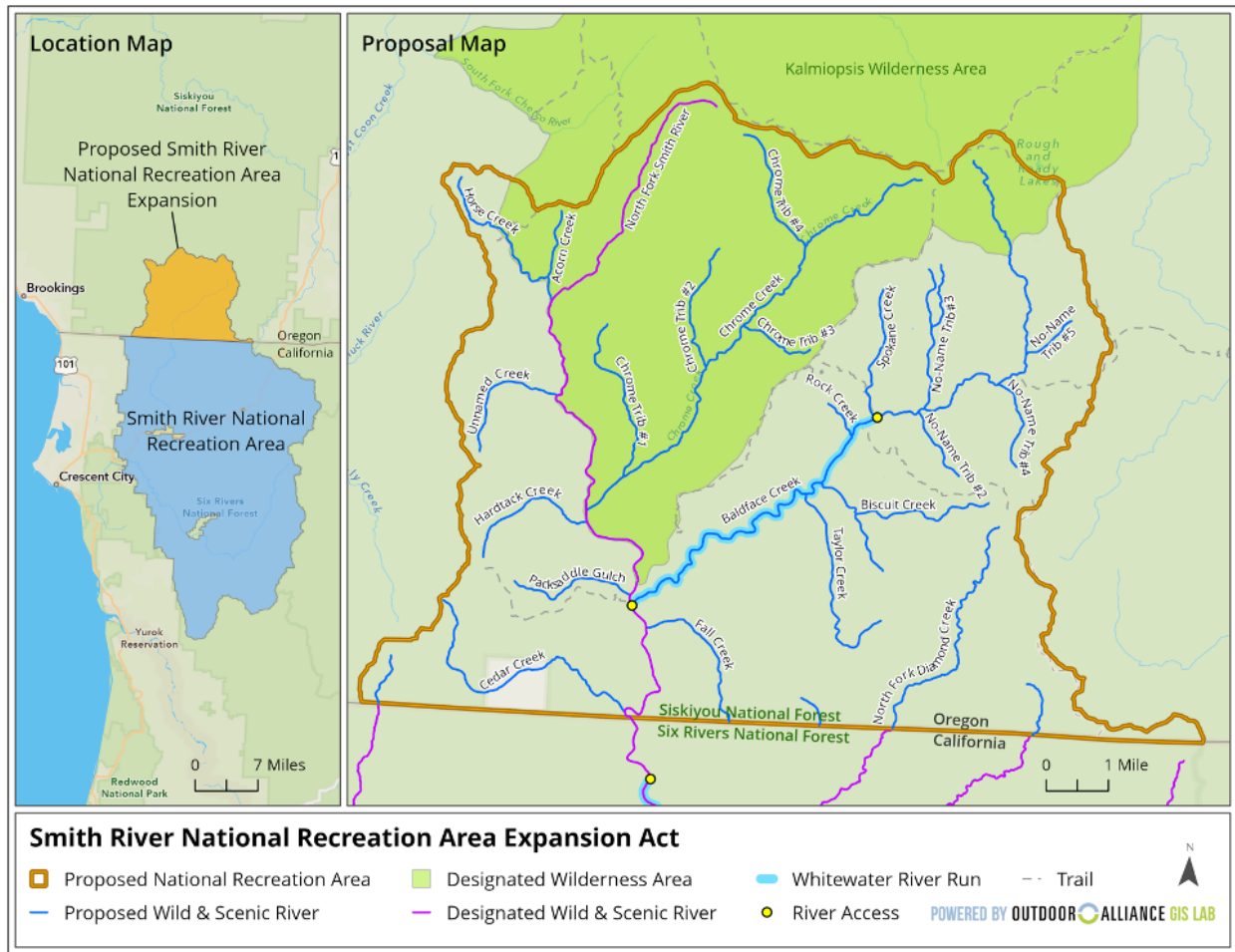
from the destructive effects of strip mining and safeguard its unique habitat and world class recreation opportunities.

The Smith River is the largest entirely free flowing river in California. Unfortunately, the Smith River National Recreation Area currently does not include the portion of the North Fork Smith in Oregon. Although relatively small in area, the bill protects the northern headwaters of the Smith River, which support a unique landscape, miles of pristine rivers and streams, and priceless recreation opportunities.

Current trends show that proximity to natural beauty and opportunities for outdoor recreation are tightly linked to increased desirability and economic development. The Smith River and its surroundings are already legendary in this regard, and the primary economic base for the region is its recreational opportunities, including fishing, hunting, whitewater paddling, cycling, hiking, backpacking, and surfing. Any damage done to the headwaters of the North Fork Smith has the potential to ripple down through all of these activities, causing significant harm to the region's economy. The legislation would protect the remaining 58,000 acres of North Fork Smith watershed, including at least 40 miles of hiking trails, a portion of the Kalmiopsis Wilderness, and 75 miles of river and tributaries, which will be designated Wild and Scenic Rivers. These extraordinary river segments include three premier wilderness whitewater paddling reaches totaling 35 miles of rugged, remote, beautiful water of the highest quality.



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Mt. Hood and Columbia River Gorge Recreation Enhancement and Conservation Act (H.R. 7665)

Outdoor Alliance strongly supports the Mt. Hood and Columbia River Gorge Recreation Enhancement and Conservation Act (REC Act).

The Mount Hood National Forest contains some of the most important and well-loved recreation resources in the country and supports wildlife habitat, clean water, air quality and climate mitigation, and intrinsic conservation value. Mt. Hood itself is one of the most identifiable, popular, and aesthetic alpine climbs in the country. The area around the peak supports backcountry ski touring, crosscountry skiing, and snowshoeing and is home to four areas offering lift-served skiing. The Forest contains hundreds of miles of high-quality trails open for mountain bikes,

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whitewater runs, and hiking opportunities. All of these resources are gaining in popularity, and supporting land managers in enhancing sustainable recreation opportunities and improving opportunities for their equitable enjoyment will help ensure the protection of conservation values, maintain the quality of the recreation experience, support local economies, and ensure the quality of life that area residents treasure.

In many ways, the REC Act is a model for progressive land management: recognizing and supporting the primacy of Tribal treaty treaties; planning and providing resources for thoughtful management of recreation and equitable access; addressing transportation issues; managing for an ecologically and socially sustainable fire regime; protecting rivers and public lands; and authorizing appropriations to help build towards a future where land managers have the resources they need to collaborate with local communities and provide the stewardship expected by the public. We commend Rep. Blumenauer and his staff for their leadership, and strongly support the bill.

Outdoor Alliance strongly supports the bill's emphasis on honoring the treaty rights of the Confederated Tribes of the Warm Springs Reservation, including through the establishment of Indian Treaty Resources Emphasis Zones and the implementation of co-management.

We commend the addition of more than 300,000 acres of the Mt. Hood National Forest into the Mt. Hood National Recreation Area and the planning requirements aimed at ensuring sustainable and equitable access while protecting conservation values, both in the Forest and in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area. Additionally, we support the development of a management plan for the Forest that supports public input and thoughtful development, as well as the creation of Recreation Centers for Excellence, both for the Gorge and Mt. Hood, to facilitate recreation resource development and stewardship. We appreciate the bill's attention to transportation management and the recognition that transportation and equitable access to the outdoors are issues for Gorge and Mt. Hood-area residents, as well as for visitors.

Among the bill's exemplary aspects is its attention to managing the Mt. Hood National Forest and surrounding areas with an emphasis on fire risk. The bill



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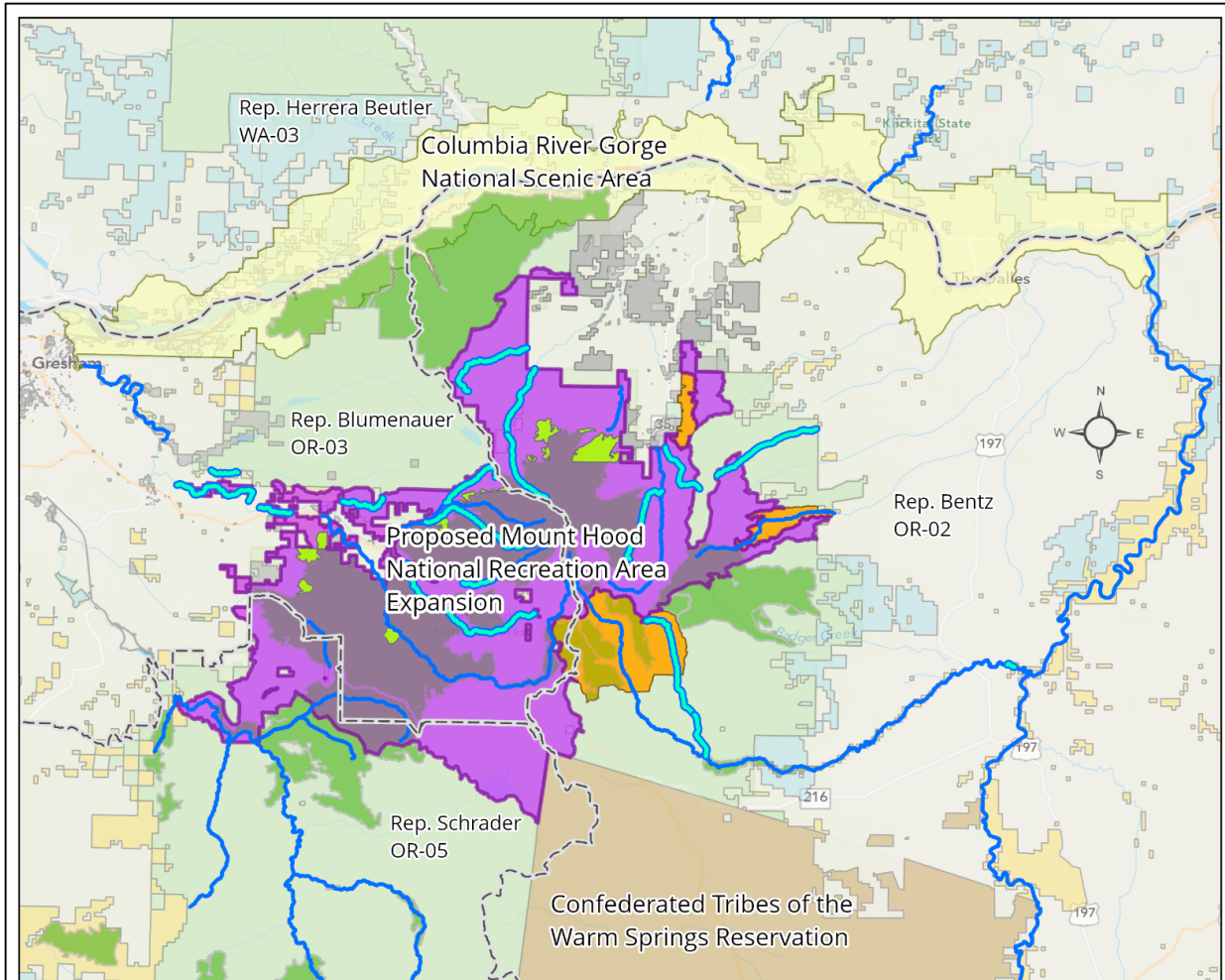
requires the development of wildfire mitigation and adaptation plans, taking into account sound science, traditional knowledge, and community input and emphasizing the necessary role of prescribed and managed fire.

We support the designation of new Wilderness, with boundaries that have been carefully drawn to support Tribal co-management and protect opportunities for mountain biking on existing and future trails. Additionally, we strongly support the designation of Wild and Scenic Rivers to protect conservation and recreation values.

Outdoor Alliance appreciates the Subcommittee's attention to the REC Act, and we look forward to continuing to work with Rep. Blumenauer and the House Natural Resources Committee in its support.



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Mt. Hood and Columbia River Gorge Recreation Enhancement and Conservation Act of 2022

REC Act of 2022

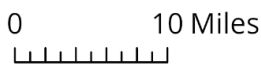
- Proposed Wild & Scenic River
 - Proposed National Recreation Area
 - Proposed Wilderness Area
- Designated Areas
- Mt. Hood Wild and Scenic River
 - Mt. Hood National Recreation Area
 - Designated Wilderness Area
 - Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area

Congressional

- 117th Congressional District

Land Management

- Bureau of Indian Affairs
- Bureau of Land Management
- U.S. Army Corps of Engineers
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- U.S. Forest Service
- Local Government
- State



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On behalf of the human-powered outdoor recreation community, thank you for your work in advancing these important bills.

Best regards,



Louis Geltman
Policy Director
Outdoor Alliance

cc: Adam Cramer, Chief Executive Officer, Outdoor Alliance
Chris Winter, Executive Director, Access Fund
Beth Spilman, Executive Director, American Canoe Association
Mark Singleton, Executive Director, American Whitewater
Kent McNeill, CEO, International Mountain Bicycling Association
Todd Walton, Executive Director, Winter Wildlands Alliance
Tom Vogl, Chief Executive Officer, The Mountaineers
Jamie Logan, Interim Director, American Alpine Club
Kaleen Deatherage, Interim Executive Director, the Mazamas
Keegan Young, Executive Director, Colorado Mountain Club
Chad Nelsen, Chief Executive Officer, Surfrider Foundation

