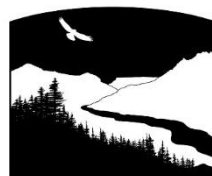


Promoting a Livable Community



**OREGON
WILD**

Formerly Oregon Natural Resources Council (ONRC)

April 1, 2016

Dear Senator Merkley,

One of your first votes as a new U.S. Senator was in support of the 2009 Omnibus Bill, which included provisions enacting a land management strategy for Cooper Spur, the Crystal Springs watershed, and surrounding Mt. Hood National Forest land. These provisions resulted from many years of hard work and collaboration between conservation organizations, local landowners, the Forest Service, Hood River residents & the Oregon congressional delegation. The intent of the 2009 Omnibus Bill was to resolve ten years of conflict over land management on the north slope of Mt. Hood. We appreciate your work in passing that important bill, and ask you to ensure it is implemented as intended.

We are writing you today with concerns about Mt. Hood National Forest's controversial Polallie Cooper Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project, planned in the same area addressed by the 2009 Omnibus Bill. This project went through a collaborative process that failed to reach consensus. Even though consensus wasn't achieved, the Forest Service chose to move forward with controversial parts of the project, including logging and road building in the Crystal Springs watershed, proposed Wilderness, potential Wilderness, near popular trails, and in the designated Wild and Scenic East Fork Hood River corridor. The goal of collaboration, and—in theory—the result, are projects that focus on areas of agreement, not that create more controversy.

As you know, the 2009 Omnibus Bill was structured so that the completion of the Mt. Hood Meadows/Government Camp Land Exchange would trigger and finalize other designations as well. We recall that this trigger was created to ensure all stakeholders got their "piece of the pie" at the same time. As all parties reasonably expected this to occur within a year or two, this seemed like a good compromise. Unfortunately, the timeframe set out by the legislation has long since passed and now Mt. Hood National Forest is moving ahead with active logging in the area *before* all provisions are enacted.

Practically, this means that the Forest Service is aiming to move forward with both logging in Wilderness that was included in the 2009 bill as well as the currently proposed Wilderness near Tamanawas Falls, a popular recreation area. It also means that the provisions regarding the Crystal Springs Watershed Special Management Unit are not binding and legally enforceable.

Because the Forest Service's proposed Polallie Cooper Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project includes controversial activities in the areas covered by the Omnibus Bill, and because the provisions of the bill are not yet legally enforceable, the Forest Service has seriously undermined our long effort toward trust-building and collaborative solutions.

However, there is a fairly easy step to take us all back in the direction intended by the 2009 Omnibus Bill: The Forest Service should put the Polallie Cooper Project on hold until the Mt. Hood Land Exchange and all provisions of the Omnibus Bill are enacted and legally enforceable. Then, we will all have our "piece of the pie" and if there is further disagreement about what is/is not allowed under the bill, all parties will be able to resolve it in court.

This need not be an indefinite delay. After many years of stalled negotiations, the Land Exchange has been revived through the combined efforts of Oregon's legislative delegation (thanks!) and a lawsuit by the Hood River Valley Residents Committee. We are hopeful that Mt. Hood National Forest and Mt. Hood Meadows will complete this exchange in a timely manner. Upon completion of this trade, all other provisions of the Omnibus Bill will also become binding. Only once this management framework is securely in place, should the Forest Service move forward with vegetation management in the affected area.

Senator Merkley, you have long supported finding collaborative solutions for federal forest management. The 2009 Omnibus Bill is one of the best examples of this collaboration that most of the parties involved have ever experienced. We ask that you request the Forest Service place its planning of the Polallie Cooper Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project on hold until such time when all the pieces of the Omnibus Bill are in place, and all parties can move forward with the surety they received their piece of pie.

Sincerely,



Erik Fernandez
Oregon Wild



Brenna Bell
Bark



Heather Staten
Hood River Valley Residents Committee