

**Statement of  
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**Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining  
S. 1589, Oregon Recreation Enhancement Act  
October 19, 2021**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on S. 1589, the Oregon Recreation Enhancement Act. S. 1589 would establish two new recreation areas encompassing nearly 130,000 acres of public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and expand the Wild Rogue Wilderness by adding approximately 60,000 acres of BLM-managed lands in western Oregon. The bill would also withdraw approximately 101,000 acres of Federal lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and the BLM in southwestern Oregon from the operation of the public land, mining, and mineral and geothermal leasing laws.

President Biden's Executive Order 14008, *Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad*, recognizes the opportunities offered by America's public lands and outlines a historic and ambitious challenge to conserve at least 30 percent of our lands and waters by 2030. Conservation can and should improve access for outdoor recreation, help protect the quality of our air and drinking water, increase resilience to the impacts of climate change, protect wildlife habitat, and support our economy, among other benefits. Our nation's awe-inspiring landscapes are an economic engine, attracting visitors from around the globe to America's public lands. According to the Bureau of Economic Analysis, outdoor recreation contributes an estimated \$460 billion to the nation's economy, with mayors and local leaders recognizing parks and open spaces as indispensable infrastructure for livable and prosperous communities. The Department welcomes the sponsor's efforts to support outdoor recreation and wilderness designations to improve conservation and appreciation of our nation's public lands, and we support S. 1589.

**Management of BLM Lands in Western Oregon**

More than 75 percent of Oregon's population resides in its western region, which also boasts some of the most productive forest lands in the world. The forests of western Oregon are critical to sustainable fish and wildlife habitat, recreation, timber, clean water, and many other values that Americans hold dear.

The Oregon and California Revested Lands Sustained Yield Management Act of 1937 (O&C Lands Act) placed 2.4 million checkerboard acres of Oregon and California Railroad and Coos Bay Wagon Road grant lands (the O&C lands) under the jurisdiction of the Department. Under the O&C Lands Act, the Department manages the O&C lands for "the purpose of providing a permanent source of timber supply, protecting watersheds, regulating stream flow, and contributing to the economic stability of local communities and industries, and providing recreational facilities." The Act also provides that the 18 O&C counties receive yearly payments

equal to 50 or 75 percent of receipts from timber harvests on O&C lands in these counties. In addition to the O&C lands, the BLM manages approximately 212,000 acres of public domain forests and other acquired lands in western Oregon. These and other BLM-managed lands also provide outstanding recreational opportunities, with over 5 million people visiting each year to enjoy hiking, camping, hunting, and fishing.

The Department manages these O&C lands, public domain forests, and other acquired lands under the 2016 Western Oregon Resource Management Plans (RMPs) and other applicable RMPs (such as the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument RMP). The 2016 RMPs provide direction for the management of approximately 2.5 million acres of BLM-administered lands and offer opportunities for tourism, recreation, and timber harvest, while maintaining protections for the northern spotted owl, listed fish species, and water resources.

### **S. 1589, Oregon Recreation Enhancement Act**

#### **Rogue Canyon & Molalla Recreation Areas**

Section 3 of S. 1589 establishes the Rogue Canyon Recreation Area on 98,000 acres of BLM-administered lands surrounding the banks of the Rogue River and overlapping Wild Rogue Wilderness. The Rogue River is well known for its challenging whitewater, steelhead and salmon fishery, rock-lined banks, and extraordinary wildlife viewing opportunities. The Department supports the establishment of the Rogue Canyon Recreation Area to improve conservation and appreciation of our public lands and waters.

The Molalla Recreation Area, also proposed for designation in Section 3, encompasses 30,000 acres of BLM-managed lands on the banks of the Molalla River, including over 5,700 acres of the Table Rock Wilderness. A remnant of a lava flow that once covered this region along the western foothills of the Cascades, the "fortress" of Table Rock stands at 4,881 feet. This rugged terrain provides habitat for the northern spotted owl, deer, elk, and endangered plants such as Oregon sullivania and Gorman's aster. The Department supports designation of the Molalla Recreation Area.

Section 3 also withdraws Federal surface and subsurface lands within the recreation areas, subject to valid existing rights, from entry, appropriation, or disposal under the public land laws; location, entry, and patent under the mining laws; and disposition under all laws pertaining to mineral and geothermal leasing or mineral materials.

The BLM recognizes the importance of locally crafted recreation and conservation areas on public lands and waters and believes they can yield immense economic benefits. The BLM believes the most effective and enduring conservation strategies are those reflecting the priorities, needs, and perspectives of the families and communities that know, live, work, and care for the lands and waters. While we support the value of safeguarding these treasured lands for present and future generations, the BLM notes the recreation designations involve O&C lands within the harvest land base established under the 2016 RMPs. If S. 1589 is enacted, BLM would likely amend its RMPs to account for the recreation orientation of the affected lands.

#### **Wild Rogue Wilderness Area Expansion**

Section 4 of S. 1589 would add approximately 60,000 acres of BLM-managed public lands to the existing 8,000-plus acres of BLM's Wild Rogue Wilderness in southwestern Oregon. These

lands serve as habitat for a diversity of plant and animal life for forest-dependent species, including the northern spotted owl, Pacific salmon, steelhead trout, and green sturgeon, and provide important opportunities for fishing, rafting, boat tours, hiking and backpacking, and other forms of outdoor recreation in the forested mountains of southwestern Oregon. The Department supports the proposed expansion of the Wild Rogue Wilderness as it aligns with the Administration's conservation goals.

### **Wildfire Risk Assessment & Mitigation Plan**

S. 1589 also directs the Secretary to complete a wildfire assessment of the recreation areas, Wild Rogue Wilderness, and adjacent Federal land in consultation with the Oregon Governor's Council on Wildfire Response. One year after completion of the wildfire assessment, the Department is directed to complete a wildfire mitigation plan addressing vegetation management, public evacuation routes, and outreach. The BLM notes wildfire risk assessment and fire and fuels management are currently addressed in the BLM's land use planning process. Additionally, the BLM works in close collaboration with the Pacific Northwest Wildfire Coordinating Group, an interagency assembly of five wildland fire agencies, two state forestry agencies, and two state fire marshal associations.

By working cooperatively, all partners can administer fire, fuels, and aviation programs in a manner that eliminates duplication, increases program efficiency, and capitalizes on the expertise of each organization's personnel. The BLM supports the sponsor's direction to pursue interagency networks to provide fire prevention services and fire safety information to the community.

### **Withdrawal of Federal Lands in Curry & Josephine Counties**

S. 1589 would permanently withdraw 5,215 acres of BLM-managed public lands in the Coos Bay and Medford Districts and 95,806 acres of USFS-managed lands. The proposed withdrawal area includes the Klamath Mountains and the North Fork of the Smith River, which originates in the Kalmiopsis Wilderness and drains most of the area under consideration for withdrawal. Creeks feeding the North Fork and other rivers that flow to the Oregon Coast offer unique ecological features stemming from the confluence of the Coast Range, Cascades, and Siskiyou Mountains. A high concentration of rare plants, forested trails, and scenic views are all emblematic of these drainages. Rough and Ready Creek and Baldface Creek are listed as eligible for National Wild and Scenic River designation by the USFS.

These lands were administratively withdrawn for 20 years by Public Land Order 7859 on December 30, 2016, for the purpose of protecting the lands while Congress considered a permanent legislative withdrawal. The Department supports permanent protection of these lands.

### **Conclusion**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of S. 1589, which would serve to provide opportunities for recreation while conserving pristine and unique natural areas in western Oregon.