

**Statement of
Robert V. Abbey
Director
Bureau of Land Management
Department of the Interior
House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands
H.R. 2781, Molalla Wild and Scenic River
H.R. 2888, Devil's Staircase Wilderness Act
October 1, 2009**

Thank you for inviting the Department of the Interior to testify on H.R. 2781, designating portions of the Molalla River in Oregon as components of the Wild and Scenic Rivers System and H.R. 2888, the Devil's Staircase Wilderness Act of 2009. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) supports both of these bills as they apply to lands we manage, and we would like to work with the sponsors and the Committee on minor refinements to both bills.

H.R. 2781—Molalla Wild and Scenic River

The Molalla River begins its journey to the sea on the western slopes of the Cascade Mountains of Oregon. At an elevation of 4,800 feet, the Molalla flows undammed for 49 miles west and north until it joins the Willamette River. For years, the Molalla suffered from too much negative attention from its visitors, including vandalism. To address these problems, local residents joined together several years ago and formed the Molalla River Alliance (MRA). The MRA, a nonprofit all volunteer organization, has over 45 public and private partners, including Federal, State, and local government agencies, user groups, and conservationists. Working cooperatively with BLM's local field office, the MRA has provided the Molalla the care it needed. Today, we are pleased that this subcommittee is considering designating approximately 21 miles of the river as a component of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

The Molalla River is home to important natural and cultural resources. Protection of this watershed is crucial as the source of drinking water for local communities and the important spawning habitat it provides for several fish species, including salmon and steelhead. Within an hour's drive of the metropolitan areas of Portland and Salem, Oregon, the Molalla watershed provides significant recreational opportunities for fishing, canoeing, mountain biking, horseback riding, hiking, hunting, camping, and swimming. A 20-mile hiking, mountain biking, and equestrian trail system draws over 65,000 visitors annually.

H.R. 2781 proposes to designate 15.1 miles of the Molalla River and 6.2 miles of the Table Rock Fork of the Molalla as components of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. In earlier planning analyses, the BLM evaluated the Molalla River and the Table Rock Fork of the Molalla River and determined that most of these two rivers should be considered for designation as wild and scenic rivers. As a result, the designation called for in H.R. 2781 would be largely consistent with management currently in place, and would cause few changes to BLM's current administration of most of this area. The 5,500-acre Table Rock Wilderness, designated by

Congress in 1984, is embraced by the Molalla and Table Rock Fork, and designation of these river segments would reinforce the protections in place for the wilderness area.

Wild and scenic rivers are designated by Congress in one of three categories: wild, scenic, or recreational. Differing management proscriptions apply for each of these designations. H.R. 2781 does not specify which classification the river should be given. The BLM recommends a recreational classification of the river segments identified in the legislation. This classification is consistent with the strong recreational values of this area, as well as the presence of roads along the course of the river segments and numerous dispersed campsites along its shorelines.

H.R. 2888, Devil's Staircase Wilderness Act

The proposed Devil's Staircase Wilderness, near the coast of southwestern Oregon, is not for the faint of heart. Mostly wild land and difficult to access, the Devil's Staircase reminds us of what much of this land looked like hundreds of years ago. A multi-storied forest of Douglas fir and western hemlock towers over underbrush of giant ferns, providing critical habitat for the threatened Northern Spotted Owl and Marbled Murrelet. The remote and rugged nature of this area provides a truly wild experience for any hiker.

H.R. 2888 proposes to designate nearly 30,000 acres as wilderness, as well as portions of both Franklin Creek and Wasson Creek as components of the Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The majority of these designations are on lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service. The Department of the Interior defers to the U.S. Department of Agriculture on those designations.

Approximately 6,100 acres of the proposed Devil's Staircase Wilderness and 4.2 miles of the Wasson Creek proposed designation are within lands managed by the BLM. The Department of the Interior supports these designations and would like to work with the sponsor and the Committee on minor boundary modifications to improve manageability.

We note that while the vast majority of the acres proposed for designation are Oregon & California (O&C) lands, identified under the 1937 O&C Lands Act for timber production, however, the BLM currently restricts timber production on these lands. These lands are administratively withdrawn from timber production by the BLM, either through designation as an Area of Critical Environmental Concern or through other classifications. Additionally, the BLM estimates that nearly 90 percent of the area proposed for designation is comprised of forest stands that are over 100 years old, and provides critical habitat for the threatened Marbled Murrelet and Northern Spotted Owl.

The 4.2 miles of Wasson Creek would be designated as a wild river to be managed by the BLM under H.R. 2888. The majority of the acres protected through this designation would be within the proposed Devil's Staircase wilderness designation, though 752 acres would be outside the proposed wilderness on adjacent BLM lands.

The designations identified on BLM-managed lands under H.R. 2888 would result in only minor modification of current management of the area and would preserve these wild lands for future generations.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of these two important Oregon designations. The Department of the Interior looks forward to working with the sponsors and the Committee on minor modifications to the legislation and to welcoming these units into the BLM's National Landscape Conservation System.