

Statement for the Record
Department of the Interior
Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on National Parks
S. 1369, Molalla River Wild and Scenic Rivers Act
November 4, 2009

Thank you for inviting the Department of the Interior to testify on S. 1369, the Molalla River Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) supports S. 1369.

Background

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.

S. 1369

S. 1369 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 S. 1369 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. S. 1369 specifies that these river segments be classified as recreational. 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.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of these important Oregon designations. The Department of the Interior looks forward to welcoming these units into the BLM's National Landscape Conservation System.