

Mineral Withdrawal Order Protects River from Suction Dredge Mining for Two Years

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Washington, D.C. – In a move intended to protect the Chetco River from the devastating environmental effects of suction dredge mining for two years, the Obama administration – at the strong urging of U.S. Senators Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) and Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.) and Representative Peter DeFazio (D-Ore.) – has announced that portions of the Chetco River will be subject to a process that allows the Forest Service to put a freeze on all future mining claims on those portions of the river. In addition, current mining claims will require validation before they can proceed. This action provides a two year window allowing Congress time to pass legislation permanently protecting these areas of the Chetco from invasive mining.

The process of suction dredge mining can destroy the habitats and spawning grounds for the many species of fish and wildlife that live in and along the Chetco River. Species of salmon and steelhead are particularly exposed to the invasive practice that can cause irreparable damage to the local ecosystem. The action taken by the administration will exempt portions of the Chetco River from an antiquated 1872 law that allows outside interests to use environmentally dangerous mining practices.

“Out-of-state mining interests can't be allowed to poison and destroy Oregon's rivers,” Wyden said. “I thank the administration for standing with the people of Oregon, and for standing up to the special interests who would pollute our state without regard for the long-term consequences.”

“Today's decision will help protect the wild beauty of the Chetco River and is critical to supporting wild salmon and steelhead trout,” said Merkley. “This is an important step in preserving this natural treasure. The next step is recognizing the Chetco as Wild and Scenic so that it is protected permanently, and I look forward to working with Senator Wyden and Congressman DeFazio to make it happen.”

“Today's announcement is a huge victory for Oregonians,” DeFazio said. “The mining withdrawal will help protect the Chetco from the threat of out-of-state miners and give Congress time to act to preserve one of Oregon's most incredible natural treasures.”

Earlier this year, Wyden, Merkley and DeFazio sent a letter to the Obama administration to ask for an exemption for the Chetco River from an antiquated 1872 law that would have allowed the mining to proceed. The three lawmakers also introduced legislation last month to classify much

of the Chetco river as Wild and Scenic, a designation that will carry with it protections meant to preserve the waterway. The legislation also prohibits any new mining claims along the river and will require current claims to meet a rigorous validation process in order to have their claims maintained. The Chetco River was recently identified by American Rivers as one of the nation's most endangered rivers.