

# Rough and Ready Creek fills bill for wild river

Mining family cries foul — status would stop big digging

By Gordon Gregory  
of the Daily Courier

If Siskiyou National Forest Supervisor Mike Lunn agrees with the findings of his staff, Rough and Ready Creek will be found eligible for inclusion in the nation's Wild and Scenic Rivers system early this summer.

And that could have far-reaching effects on an Illinois Valley family's plan to develop a potentially large mine along the creek, a tributary of the Illinois River.

Stressing that no decision has been made, Lunn said the available evidence supports an eligibility finding.

"It has extremely high botanical (values)," he said, referring to several rare plants and the rich diversity of vegetation found in the drainage.

Following a public-comment period that ends in about two weeks, Lunn will sign the formal conclusion. If he finds the river is eligible for inclusions in the system, the Siskiyou would have to begin managing the area as if it were a designated waterway.

In general, that means that tougher environmental reviews and somewhat higher standards of protection would be required.

"Once eligible, we have to protect to the highest potential classification," he said.

Waterways included in the Wild and Scenic Rivers system are classified as recreational, scenic or wild, depending largely on the level of development and access. Most of the roughly 40 miles of

perennial streams comprising the Rough and Ready Creek system are inaccessible to motorized traffic, and there is almost no development in the area.

There is, however, a large collection of nearly untouched mining claims controlled by Walt Freeman and his family that might support a sizable surface mine.

Freeman said they have roughly 8,000 acres of claims in the area and have filed patent applications on about 4,300 acres. The claims are generally along the north and south forks of Rough and Ready Creek, just east of the Kalmiopsis Wilderness.

Freeman expects the creek will be found eligible for Wild and Scenic Rivers designation. And that, he said, could threaten the mining operation that he and his family have been working toward for decades.

"There's one and only one reason for having Wild and Scenic river designation, anywhere, and that is to limit or eliminate development. And the only possible development is that mining project that we've been working on all these years," he said.

Freeman believes the claims contain sufficient iron, chromite and nickel for smelting into stainless steel. His family hopes to develop both a mine and a nearby electric-powered, pollution-free smelter for processing.

In December, Freeman submitted a

plan to the Siskiyou to remove up to 5,000 tons of ore from the site for testing. The proposal calls for four crossings of Rough and Ready Creek.

Freeman had hoped to remove the material this summer, but he fears that a finding of eligibility will mean the Siskiyou will conduct an in-depth environmental review.

"To me, it's simply an attempt to further complicate any kind of mineral development in the area," he said.

The Siskiyou undertook its review of Rough and Ready Creek as part of a settlement of a 1989 appeal filed by an environmental group, American Rivers Inc. That organization challenged the Siskiyou's forest plan, claiming the plan did not adequately assess the forest's rivers and creeks suitability for inclusion in the Wild and Scenic Rivers System.

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