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# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-3703

August 3, 1999

The Honorable William Jefferson Clinton  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20500

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Commerce, Science  
& Transportation  
Energy & Natural Resources  
Environment & Public Works  
Special Committee on Aging

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Dear Mr. President:

As you know, Oregonians are proud of our deep commitment to protecting our special natural areas. We realize you share the desire to preserve the beauty and natural heritage of Oregon for future generations. Today, I am asking that you direct your administration to work with me and all other interested Oregonians to secure additional protection of some extraordinary lands.

This job must be tackled in the Oregon tradition: through an open, inclusive process that insures full public debate; opportunities to build consensus; and a sensitivity to Oregon's special rural traditions and local economic needs. The lands I discuss in this letter continue to be the subject of strong local -- and some national -- concern. I am convinced that by working constructively with all Oregonians, your administration can assist me and the Oregon congressional delegation in bringing the people of my state together, as we resolve any differences and work towards a mutual goal: protecting Oregon for our children and grandchildren.

## Steens Mountain

Steens Mountain is an Oregon crown jewel. It is phenomenal country, both in its natural beauty and in its long-standing ranching culture. The Steens deserve more significant protection and I believe it is possible to restore the area's natural ecosystems while still factoring in the needs of the region's ranchers.

As you may know, Interior Secretary Babbitt has expressed interest in providing additional protection to the Steens, and plans to visit the area soon. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) responded to the Secretary's interest in the Steens with the appointment of the Steens Mountain management subcommittee of the Resource Advisory Council (RAC).

I look forward to the RAC's recommendations. I have already discussed this issue with my Senate colleague, Gordon Smith, and the Congressman from the area, Greg Walden, and I do not want to see the RAC's work, which will be completed October 20, 1999, or other homegrown consensus-building efforts occurring within that time frame, preempted by federal administrative actions.

In my discussions with individuals on all sides of this issue, I find a strong common interest in protecting the land, restoring natural ecosystems and retaining the wild, open character of the mountain. It is clear to me that to be successful, and to find a solution which has the broad support of Oregonians, our work will necessarily require the greater involvement of local landowners and regional conservationists. I hope to facilitate discussions with these groups in an effort to find an acceptable, progressive approach to protecting Steens Mountain.

### **Soda Mountain**

Located in a rugged area in southern Oregon, Soda Mountain creates an ecological crossroads between the Siskiyou mountain range and the Cascade range. Soda Mountain, incorporating the temperate forests of western Oregon, the dry California chaparral brush lands and the moist marine environment of the Pacific Ocean, lies just west of Oregon's high desert country. A survey by the World Wildlife Fund named this unique, environmentally diverse area one of the top centers for biodiversity in the world.

The Soda Mountain Wilderness Study Area (WSA) sits at the heart of the larger Cascade Siskiyou Ecological Emphasis Area (CSEEA). The CSEEA was born out of the Northwest Forest Plan, providing a tool to manage the unique ecological resources of the area in which there is currently a ten-year moratorium on timber harvesting.

In 1992, the Bush administration recommended the Soda Mountain WSA for wilderness protection. This year, the Senate Appropriations Committee formally recognized the ecological importance of the area by approving \$250,000 in Land and Water Conservation Funds for the acquisition from willing landowners of WSA inholdings. A proposal for greater protection of the larger CSEEA would be desirable. By working with local governments, timber operators, environmentalists and grazing permittees, we can move forward with a land protection proposal that would enjoy broad public support.

### **Badlands**

The Badlands WSA is located near Bend, Oregon. Like Soda Mountain, it also merits wilderness or other special protection. The Badlands is rugged, high desert country laced with volcanic ridges, outcrops and basins. Conservationists view the Badlands as a unique opportunity to restore a native high desert ecosystem in a quickly urbanizing area where the demand for wilderness, recreation and open space is increasing.

Local ranchers and conservationists are working together toward wilderness because they see it as the best use of these lands. The largest permittees seek to voluntarily retire their grazing permits if, in turn, the allotments are permanently retired from grazing. Because designation as wilderness has no effect on livestock use, this voluntary permit retirement would clearly aid in the preservation of wilderness value, wildlife habitat and restoration of a native ecosystem in close proximity to one of the fastest-growing urban areas in Oregon.

### **Rough and Ready Creek, Kalmiopsis**

Rough and Ready Creek is within the South Kalmiopsis roadless area of the Siskiyou National Forest. The creek is a major tributary of the Illinois River, and portions of the area have already been recognized by the Forest Service for outstanding botanical and scientific values. Indeed, this region is identified by a broad array of regional, national and international scientific and conservation organizations as among the world's best centers for biological diversity.

I have been working with Congressman DeFazio, local conservationists and your administration for the past two years in an effort to prevent damage to the Rough and Ready Creek watershed from speculative mining operations. It is imperative that the area's water quality, special biodiversity and recreational opportunities be protected. As this effort continues, it is clear that special protective status for this area will further these efforts.

### **Bull Run/Little Sandy Watershed**

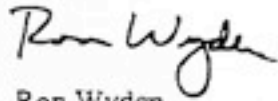
Finally, I ask that you work with me to protect the Bull Run/Little Sandy watershed which provides pure drinking water for more than one-quarter of the state's population. In the 104<sup>th</sup> Congress, I was honored to have been the principal sponsor of legislation protecting the Bull Run as part of Senator Hatfield's Oregon Resources and Conservation Act of 1996 (ORCA). My original bill called for protection of the Little Sandy sub-basin and buffer areas, as well, in order to fully protect the metropolitan region's water resources, but these protections were not included as a part of ORCA.

The City of Portland and a large coalition of local, state and national environmental groups support permanent protection for this precious public asset. In addition to its use as a watershed area for Portland, the Little Sandy provides a unique opportunity for steelhead recovery efforts close to a substantial metropolitan area. Through the collaborative efforts of the City of Portland, the State of Oregon and Portland General Electric Company, the Little Sandy dam will be removed and fish passage restored, opening approximately seven miles of important steelhead habitat and making recovery in this portion of the Bull Run watershed a very real possibility. Protection for the Little Sandy watershed would build on these exciting collaborative efforts.

In the 105<sup>th</sup> Congress, Congressman Blumenauer joined me in introducing legislation to protect the Little Sandy, and we plan to press for its protection again in this Congress. I would welcome your assistance in meeting this critical conservation goal.

As we move forward to protect the important Oregon lands discussed in this letter, I want to reiterate my desire that the task be addressed in an inclusive, public fashion. I believe we will discover a well-spring of public support for the protection of these unique lands.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ron Wyden". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping "W" and "Y".

Ron Wyden  
United States Senator