

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 21, 2010

The Honorable Ken Salazar
Secretary
U.S. Department of Interior
1849 C St., NW
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Salazar and Secretary Vilsack:

We are writing to you for a second time to strongly urge you to use your authorities under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act to administratively withdraw three sensitive areas from mineral entry in southwest Oregon: approximately 19 miles of the Scenic and Recreational segments of the Chetco River, the Rough and Ready Creek Watershed, and the Baldface Creek Watershed.

On November 12, 2009, we wrote to you requesting your assistance in protecting these unique, biological diverse and threatened areas of southwest Oregon. At that time we impressed upon you the importance of the region and the immediate need to administratively withdraw these areas from mining activity under the Mining Law of 1872. We impressed upon you to reconsider reinstatement of the Clinton withdrawal for the Rogue-River Siskiyou National Forest and adjacent lands.

On March 01, 2010 - nearly four months after sending our joint letter - the USDA responded by stating these areas were already "adequately protected from the surface impacts of mining operations by enforcing existing Federal laws and regulations." On March 18, 2010, BLM indicated that there was "little interest" in locating new mining claims in the Siskiyou Rivers area. We believe that, particularly in view of the President Obama's new America's Great Outdoors Initiative, your agencies are underestimating the critical and immediate threats to this area.

We have attached a number of recent editorials and news articles from Oregon press outlets to underscore our belief that these areas are not receiving adequate protection and the need for immediate administrative action remains. As you can see from the attached press clips, the protection of the Chetco River, the Rough and Ready Creek Watershed, and the Baldface Creek Watershed are broadly supported in our communities and state.

More than 800 new mining claims have been filed in southwest Oregon under the Mining Law of 1872 over the last decade. The recent ban on suction dredge mining in California combined with high prices for minerals has created a new gold rush in a corner of our home state, which happens to be one of the most ecologically diverse places

in the United States. Immediate administrative action is needed to protect these areas and to reduce user conflicts between miners and the general public before the mining season opens in a few months.

The Chetco River serves as pristine habitat for threatened fish species, like the Coho salmon, and provides an important water source for the cities of Brookings and Harbor on the Oregon coast. The Chetco River has also served as a significant economic driver for local communities given the river's extraordinary recreational opportunities such as fishing, hiking, and rafting.

An administrative withdrawal of approximately 19 miles of the Chetco River within the boundaries of the Rogue-Siskiyou National Forest is needed to give Congress time to act on the Forest Service's own recommendations documented in the agency's 1993 Management Plan for the National Wild and Scenic Chetco River. In addition to the Forest Service's recommendation to Congress, which would result in the withdrawal of two miles of the Chetco under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, the management plan also recommended the administrative withdrawal of the Scenic segment of the Chetco. Congressional designation of the Chetco River will take time; we need your assistance in preserving the resource values of the Chetco River through an administrative withdrawal until Congress can legislate a long-term solution.

The Rough and Ready Creek Watershed is one of the most botanically diverse areas on the West Coast and is eligible to be added to the National Wild and Scenic River System. The Forest Service has already contributed substantial resources to studying the area and has confirmed that the Rough and Ready Creek Watershed contains "incredible natural values" and mining in the area would result in "irreversible and significant" impacts.

The unique resource values of the Rough and Ready Creek Watershed are threatened by the prospect of a large nickel mining operation. This operation has been widely opposed by the local population due to its potential health and environmental impacts and cost to taxpayers. In 2003 through 2005, the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service spent hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars to conduct a complex mineral exam of the 161 mining claims in the area. The claims were found not valid. Despite this great expense to the public, the area remains open to new mining claims - which could result in additional mining proposals and possibly set up another round of expensive and duplicative mineral exams and mining plan analysis at great cost to taxpayers.

The Baldface Creek Watershed is situated within the Forest Service's Recommended Wilderness Addition to the Kalmiopsis Wilderness and is also eligible to be added to the National Wild and Scenic River System. The Baldface Creek Watershed is one of the most pristine and secluded areas in the state and is an important tributary of the Smith River. Large blocks of nickel laterite claims and the potential for

new claims pose an immediate threat to this incredible roadless area and some of the best remaining freshwater steelhead habitat on the West Coast.

Given the unique and valuable resource values of these areas, the immediate and serious threat they face, and the overwhelming public support for action, we strongly urge you to reconsider administratively withdrawing from mineral entry approximately 19 miles of the Chetco River, the Rough and Ready Creek Watershed, and the Baldface Creek Watershed. An administrative withdrawal will give Congress the time it needs to provide the necessary long term protections these Oregon treasures need and deserve.

We look forward to your timely and meaningful response to this second letter.

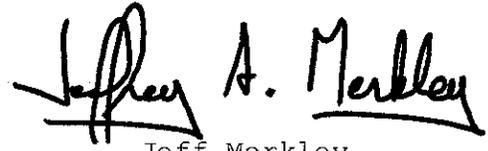
Sincerely,



Peter DeFazio
Member of Congress



Ron Wyden
Senator



Jeff Merkley
Senator