

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

November 15, 2018

Secretary Ryan Zinke
U.S. Department of the Interior
1949 C St., N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Secretary Sonny Perdue
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Zinke and Secretary Perdue:

We are writing for the second time this year to strongly urge you to use your authorities under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act to administratively implement a withdraw from mineral entry approximately 17 miles of the Scenic and Recreational segments (5,610 acres) of the Chetco River in southwest Oregon.

As you are aware, withdrawal protections for the Chetco River are an issue we have actively and repeatedly supported. In each of the last five Congresses we have introduced legislation that will withdraw portions of the Chetco River from mineral entry and upgrade the Wild and Scenic Designations of other portions to ensure long-term protections for this important river. In the 115th Congress, there are currently a number of separate pieces of legislation to permanently withdraw this stretch of the Chetco River, and in October 2018 the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee passed Chetco River protections as part of the Oregon Wildlands Act (S. 1548).

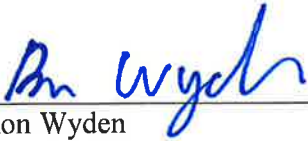
Your agencies have, on two occasions, taken steps to protect the Chetco River from mining activities -- first, by issuing a two-year administrative segregation in 2011, and subsequently by issuing a five-year withdrawal in 2013 (Public Land Order No. 7819). However, the five-year administrative withdrawal of the Chetco River, which took effect in July 2013, expired earlier this year despite the U.S. Forest Service's application in 2016 to extend it. The river is currently in need of a new administrative withdrawal under 43 U.S.C. §1714 (c).

The Chetco River serves as pristine habitat for threatened fish species, like the Coho salmon, and provides an important water sources for the cities of Brookings and Harbor on the Oregon coast. The Chetco River has also served as a significant economic driver in the region given the river's extraordinary recreational opportunities such as fishing, hiking, and rafting. As we wrote in our April 15, 2018, letter, to further delay continued protections for the Chetco River may result in undue harm for a world-class salmon and steelhead river, as well as a source of clean drinking water for two communities in southwest Oregon.

An administrative withdrawal of approximately 17 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 to Congress documented in the agency's 1993 Management Plan for the National Wild and Scenic Chetco River, as well as the agency's recommendation for the withdrawal of the Scenic segment of the Chetco River.

Given the unique and valuable resource values of the Chetco River, the immediate and serious threat they face, and the overwhelming public support for action, we strongly urge you to administratively implement a withdrawal from mineral entry approximately 17 miles (5,610 acres) of the Wild and Scenic Chetco River. An administrative withdrawal will give Congress the time it needs to provide the necessary long-term protections this Oregon treasure needs and deserves.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator



Peter DeFazio
Member of Congress



Jared Huffman
Member of Congress