

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

July 11, 2011

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

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

Dear Secretary Salazar and Secretary Vilsack:

We are writing you today regarding the July 2010 Forest Service commitment to protect approximately 19 miles of the National Wild and Scenic Chetco River in Oregon by requesting an administrative withdrawal. More than a year ago, the Forest Service pledged to formally request that the Bureau of Land Management take this action in order to give Congress time to act on pending legislation that would withdraw areas of the Chetco River from mineral entry.

The segregation for these areas has still not been completed, and they remain under threat from invasive suction dredge mining practices. We are concerned that these delays may diminish the utility of future Congressional action and ask that you act immediately to fulfill the pledge your agencies made a year ago to protect these areas.


We are also concerned about the lack of action your agencies have taken with regards to the Rough and Ready Creek and the Baldface Creek Watersheds. As we have written in the past, these areas are also threatened by irresponsible mining practices. While legislation has yet to be introduced to protect these areas, your agencies still have the power to withdraw these areas from mineral entry without such introduction. We urge you to work together to protect these two watersheds, which are just as critical as the Chetco River. An administrative withdrawal of all three of these areas will give Congress the time it needs to provide the necessary long term protection each of these Oregon treasures needs and deserves.

As you know, we have urged protection of these areas for some time now. In 2001, after a request from the Oregon Congressional delegation, the Clinton Administration proposed withdrawing the entire Rogue River - Siskiyou National Forest, the Rough and Ready Creek Watershed, and the South Kalimiopsis in order to safeguard this area from mining activity. However, the Bush Administration did not implement this mineral withdrawal and the land remained open for new mining claims, and mining continued on invalid claims. We have written to your agencies repeatedly since that time on this issue. We believe the time for action is now.

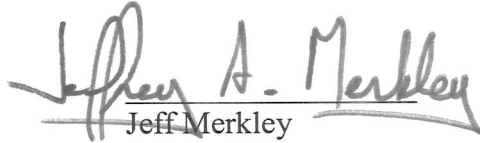
Allowing mining in these areas threatens some of Southern Oregon's most unique natural treasures. The Forest Service has already committed to an administrative withdrawal of portions of the Chetco River, and this process must be completed. It is also important that the agencies act now to protect the unique resources in the Rough and Ready Creek Watershed and the Baldface Creek Watersheds. We strongly urge you to use your authorities under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act to administratively withdraw these three sensitive areas from mineral mining. This subject has been brought up numerous times during the past two decades,

and it time for the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management respond to the direction that has been advised by experts within both agencies, the Oregon congressional delegation, and the local communities.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
US Senator



Jeff Merkley
US Senator



Peter DeFazio
US Representative