

*Friends of the Kalmiopsis • Kalmiopsis Audubon Society • Earthworks • Rogue Riverkeeper
Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center • American Rivers • Northwest Rafting Company • Soda
Mountain Wilderness Council • Cascadia Wildlands • Wild Salmon Center • Oregon Coast Alliance
Rogue Group Sierra Club -Curry Section • Oregon Council Trout Unlimited • Oregon Wild
Oregon Kayak and Canoe Club • Lower Columbia Canoe Club • American Whitewater*

December 14, 2012

Alan Vandiver, District Ranger
Gold Beach Ranger District
U.S. Forest Service
29279 Ellensburg Ave,
Gold Beach, OR, 97444

Re: Chetco Wild and Scenic River Mineral Withdrawal #39161

Submitted by email to: comments-pacificnorthwest-siskiyou-goldbeach@fs.fed.us

Dear Mr. Vandiver:

Thank you for this opportunity to comment on the Chetco Wild and Scenic River Mineral Withdrawal Environmental Assessment. Please accept these comments on behalf of the following conservation organizations in support of the proposed mineral withdrawal of national forest lands along the Chetco Wild and Scenic River. The mineral withdrawal is in aid of legislation (S. 764, H.R. 1415) to protect approximately 19 river miles within the river corridor designated Wild and Scenic in 1988.

The environmental assessment (EA) makes the correct determination that suction dredge mining results in unacceptable detrimental impacts to all of the Outstandingly Remarkable Values (fishery, water clarity and recreation) for which the river was designated.

We fully agree and support the EA's conclusion that, "Full protection of the river's Outstandingly Remarkable Values – recreation, water quality and fish – can only occur through a mineral withdrawal." Moreover, the EA makes clear that these Outstanding Resource Values are a crucial economic driver for local communities, whereas there is no documentation that suction dredge mining plays a significant economic role on the Chetco.

The proposed mineral withdrawal (Alternative 2) is a vital bridge for legislation (S. 764, H.R. 1415), and it enjoys overwhelming public support as signified by the 11,800 people who wrote in support of the withdrawal notice -- with over 99 percent in favor of the proposed withdrawal.

Associate Deputy Chief of the Forest Service Jim Peña testified in support of HR 1415 on March 8, 2012, stating that, “The Chetco River was added to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System in 1988 to protect its important anadromous fishery, water quality, and recreational values. The Chetco River supports significant populations of anadromous winter steelhead, fall Chinook salmon, and sea-run cutthroat with resident cutthroat and rainbow trout abundant in its upper reaches. The River has striking water color and clarity and the ability to clear quickly following storm events. It also contributes exceptionally pure and clean water to the domestic water supplies for the communities of Brookings and Harbor, Oregon. The withdrawal proposed in this bill will help protect these regionally significant values.

Sincerely,

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Enclosed:

1. Letter to Mark Stopher, California Department of Fish and Game, from Randy Moore, Regional Forester, Pacific Southwest Region, re: Suction Dredging Program Draft SEIR Comments, May 10, 2011.
2. Brief Comments by Jon Grunbaum, USFS Fisheries Biologist for the mid-Klamath and lower Salmon Rivers Region, Summary of Fisheries Issues Concerning Suction Dredge Mining, April 24, 2004.
3. Letter to Scott Conroy, Supervisor, Rogue River Siskiyou National Forest, November 17, 2011, from Friends of the Kalmiopsis and Rogue Riverkeeper. Re: Mining and Mineral Withdrawal on Scenic Segment of the National Wild and Scenic Illinois River (includes photos that illustrate impacts and user conflicts).
4. *Federal Register*, Vol. 70, No. 107, Monday, June 6, 2005. 36CFR Part 228, Clarification as to When a Notice of Intent to Operate and/or Plan of Operation is Needed for Locatable Mineral Operations on National Forest System Lands.
5. "Wall of Salmon," Chinook salmon, recreation section, National Wild & Scenic Chetco River, 11-11-2011, photograph by Thomas Dunklin, used with permission