



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

December 14, 2012

Honorable Senator Ron Wyden  
Honorable Senator Jeff Merkley  
Honorable Representative Peter DeFazio  
Honorable Representative Earl Blumenauer

Dear Senator Wyden, Senator Merkley, Representative DeFazio, and Representative Blumenauer:

2012 has been a big year for National Wild and Scenic Chetco River. We want to thank you for your work to protect this beautiful world-class salmon and steelhead stream and also to review for you some of the extraordinary public support, attention, and opportunity that this beloved river has received. We must underscore that the gains to protect it from large-scale instream mining remain tenuous, and so we urge you to make them permanent through the passage of the Chetco River Protection Act at the earliest opportunity.

After four years of public scrutiny, there continues to be overwhelming support for providing greater protection for the Chetco through withdrawing it from new entry and location under the 1872 Mining Law. Over 11,000 citizens wrote to the Bureau of Land Management and Forest Service to support the mineral withdrawal “in aid of legislation.” At local public meetings, the support was also overwhelming.

The Chetco River was featured in a *New York Times* Guest Opinion by prominent fisheries biologists about why rivers are threatened more than ever by mining. In addition, the former Chief of the Forest Service and former supervisor of the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest (now Senior Scientist with Trout Unlimited) editorialized in the *Oregonian* in support of the Chetco River Protection Act.

Fishing has been good this season, despite the wet storms from the Pacific, and was spectacular last season. Hundreds turned out for the jointly sponsored “Cherish the Chetco” event in the fall. More and more river runners are discovering the two-mile stretch your legislation would protect as a “Wild River Area” and the equally wild three miles downstream.

Foremost, the forfeiture of almost 20 miles of mining claims on the river—both within the Kalmiopsis Wilderness and 15 miles outside the Wilderness—presented the public with a

great opportunity this year. Because Congress permanently withdrew the Kalmiopsis Wilderness from mineral entry in 1984, the forfeiture means that operation of the last three federal mining claims inside the Wilderness were extinguished forever. After almost a century of struggle and millions of dollars, the Kalmiopsis Wilderness is now finally free of federal mining claims and threat of mining on these claims.

This year's forfeiture also provides us with the opportunity to eliminate the threat of mining on 15 more miles of the Wild and Scenic Chetco through the administrative mineral withdrawal and Chetco River Protection Act legislation.

The Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest has just released the environmental assessment (EA) for the 5-year withdrawal in aid of legislation for the Wild and Scenic Chetco River. The EA makes clear that suction dredge mining along the river threatens the outstandingly remarkable values for which the area was designated. It emphasizes that these values are important economic drivers for local communities and that these values can only be fully protected through the proposed mineral withdrawal. After the comment period closes, the Regional Forester will make a recommendation to the State Director of the BLM, who will then forward his recommendation to the Secretary of the Interior's office for action.

It could be a very close race to get the administrative withdrawal in place before the current 2-year segregation (temporary withdrawal) expires. The administrative mineral withdrawal is an important—but only temporary—bridge to the ultimate goal of lasting protection afforded by the Chetco River Protection Act.

We hope that protecting the Chetco permanently from mining does not become embroiled in the controversy over O&C lands. There are no O&C lands within the Wild and Scenic Chetco River corridor or adjacent to it.

In 2010, the Chetco River was listed as one of the nation's Most Endangered Rivers by American Rivers; in 2013, with your help, we hope to see its protection through passage of the Chetco River Protection Act.

On behalf of our tens of thousands of members, we thank for your continuing efforts to provide greater protection for the National Wild and Scenic Chetco River. With its crystal clear water, big salmon, wild backcountry, and fabulous camp spots, the Chetco is a great American outdoor treasure; it's also the beloved backyard river of local communities that benefit economically from its world-class salmon and steelhead fishery and the pure drinking water it provides. It is our great hope that we can work together in the coming year to protect all these outstanding values for the next generation.

Sincerely,

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