

OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

January 7, 2022

Rep. Earl Blumenauer
1111 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Sen. Ron Wyden
221 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Re: Legislative Concepts: Recreation Enhancement, Wildfire Resiliency, and Conservation for Mt. Hood and the Columbia River Gorge

Dear Rep. Blumenauer and Sen. Wyden:

On behalf of the human-powered outdoor recreation community, thank you for your attention to protecting recreation and conservation values for Mount Hood and the Columbia River Gorge as reflected in “Legislative Concepts: Recreation Enhancement, Wildfire Resiliency, and Conservation for Mt. Hood and the Columbia River Gorge.” We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the draft concepts and look forward to continuing to work with you and your staff to refine the proposal and move forward these important investments in recreation, conservation, and quality of life for area residents and visitors.

Outdoor Alliance is a coalition of ten member-based organizations representing the human powered outdoor recreation community. The coalition includes Access Fund, American Canoe Association, American Whitewater, International Mountain Bicycling Association, Winter Wildlands Alliance, The Mountaineers, the American Alpine Club, the Mazamas, Colorado Mountain Club, and Surfrider Foundation and represents the interests of the millions of Americans who climb, paddle, mountain bike, backcountry ski and snowshoe, and enjoy coastal recreation on our nation’s public lands, waters, and snowscapes.

Mount Hood and the Columbia River Gorge are nationally and internationally renowned for their superlative outdoor recreation opportunities, and nearby communities both rely on outdoor recreation as an economic driver and are home to many individuals who live in the area in whole or in part because of access to



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world class outdoor recreation. Many of these communities are also home to groups that have historically been less connected with outdoor recreation opportunities on federal public lands because of racial inequities, and we view the envisioned legislative effort as an important opportunity to address these disparities and help Oregonians of all backgrounds to connect with their public lands and waters.

The statement of key themes in the legislative concepts draft resonates strongly with us, and we greatly appreciate the emphasis on equity, conservation, recreation, wildfire resilience, honoring Tribal rights, and modernizing transportation systems.

Updating Mount Hood National Recreation Area

Outdoor Alliance strongly supports efforts to expand and modernize management for the Mount Hood National Recreation Area. Mount Hood National Forest is home to a diversity of recreational opportunities and pursuits that occur across a range of settings that merit protection for their recreational values. These protections can provide an extremely high degree of protection for conservation values while allowing for sustainable activities (for example, mountain biking) that are not necessarily compliant with Wilderness management. Additionally, many high quality recreation opportunities are found on frontcountry landscapes that are not suitable for Wilderness designation but nevertheless deserve a high degree of protection from incompatible extractive uses. Key areas may require more active management to reduce fire risk; use of chainsaws or other non-Wilderness-compliant equipment to maintain trails; mechanical grooming for winter recreation; or other infrastructure incompatible with Wilderness designation. These locations still will support significant conservation values, and we strongly support management prescriptions to ensure the sustainability of recreation activities and the protection of conservation values.

We strongly support the consideration of winter-specific needs through this process, including the unique transportation challenges posed in winter and the need to protect high-quality opportunities for quiet winter recreation.



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Wildfire planning, mitigation, rehabilitation

Uncharacteristic wildfire will continue to be an increasing risk in the Mount Hood National Forest as the result of climate change and decades of fire suppression. We strongly support a modern approach to protecting communities while mitigating risk through appropriate, ecologically sound treatment practices and returning to a more natural role for fire on the landscape through activities like prescribed burning.

Enhancing trail stewardship on the Mount Hood National Forest

Outdoor Alliance strongly supports the draft concepts' focus on enhancing trail-based recreation opportunities on Mount Hood National Forest. We particularly appreciate the emphasis on ensuring that the Forest has sufficient staff to capitalize on partnership and volunteer opportunities. Given the tremendous growth in popularity of mountain biking—and the surprising shortage in quality mountain biking opportunities for Portland-based riders—we believe that specifically identifying the need for increased opportunities for mountain-bike-specific trails is appropriate.

Recreation enhancement for the Pacific Crest Trail

The Pacific Crest Trail is a world renowned resource, and we support efforts to protect and enhance the PCT experience.

Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area trail planning and sustainability

Outdoor Alliance supports efforts to foster sustainable trail and recreation opportunities in the Columbia River Gorge. These efforts must ensure a strong voice for Gorge communities and allow efforts to be directed by the desires of those communities. We strongly encourage the consideration of Gorge communities, as well, in sections devoted to transportation and equitable access, recognizing that the Gorge is not just a destination for visitors, but a home to vibrant communities increasingly affected by increased visitation. Equitable access provisions should include consideration for connecting BIPOC communities in the Gorge to recreation opportunities, including on the Mount Hood National Forest.



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New additions to the Mount Hood Wilderness

Outdoor Alliance supports the consideration of new Wilderness designations through this legislative process. Our ability to review specific proposed additions was limited, however, by not having access to the GIS shape files for proposed designations. We are hopeful to have access to those files in the near future, which will enable us to provide more detailed feedback concerning potential conflicts between Wilderness designation and other resource values. We share the concerns regarding specific parcels articulated in the comment of the Oregon Mountain Biking Coalition and look forward to working with you to address these conflicts and find a path forward that protects existing and prospective mountain biking opportunities as well as conservation values.

Designation of new Wild and Scenic Rivers

Wild and Scenic River designation is an invaluable way of protecting recreation and conservation values, not only for the designated segment, but the river corridor. We support the recommendations outlined in the comments of our member organization American Whitewater.

Ensuring Tribal sovereignty and treaty rights are honored

Outdoor Alliance strongly supports the legislative concepts as outlined for ensuring that Tribal sovereignty and treaty rights are honored.

Enhancing safe, reliable access to the Columbia River Gorge and Mount Hood

Outdoor Alliance strongly supports the goals concerning transportation outlined in the draft concepts. We are particularly interested in ensuring that parking and access for winter recreation is maintained and enhanced and that sustainable efforts are undertaken to reduce congestion and provide public transit options. Additionally, believe it is important to consider not only access to Mount Hood and the Gorge from Portland, but to look for opportunities to enhance transportation options for residents of the Gorge and Mt. Hood-adjacent communities, both to recreational resources and to other nearby communities, including Portland.



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Enhancing public safety

Outdoor Alliance supports the public safety concepts as outlined in the draft. We are particularly encouraged to see the emphasis on equity; the recognition of the need for increased resources for local counties and search and rescue; and the emphasis on visitor education. We are keen to ensure that public safety efforts do not become a means of putting inappropriate constraints on more adventurous forms of recreation, but rather provide education for visitors and resources for land managers and communities.

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Outdoor Alliance and our members are deeply grateful for your leadership in working to advance the initiatives outlined in the Legislative Concepts document. Mount Hood and the Columbia River Gorge are superlative landscapes that merit this attention, and we look forward to continuing to work with you and your staff to refine these concepts and advance legislation.

Best regards,



Louis Geltman
Policy Director
Outdoor Alliance

cc: Adam Cramer, Chief Executive Officer, Outdoor Alliance
Chris Winter, Executive Director, Access Fund
Beth Spilman, Executive Director, American Canoe Association
Mark Singleton, Executive Director, American Whitewater
Kent McNeill, CEO, International Mountain Bicycling Association
Todd Walton, Executive Director, Winter Wildlands Alliance
Tom Vogl, Chief Executive Officer, The Mountaineers
Mitsu Iwasaki, Chief Executive Officer, American Alpine Club
Sarah Bradham, Interim Executive Director, the Mazamas
Keegan Young, Executive Director, Colorado Mountain Club
Chad Nelson, Chief Executive Officer, Surfrider Foundation

