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November 18th, 2021

Representative Joe Neguse, Chairman
National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands Subcommittee
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Russ Fulcher, Ranking Member
National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands Subcommittee
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

RE: National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands Subcommittee Legislative Hearing, H.R. 980, *Southwestern Oregon Watershed and Salmon Protection Act of 2021* (DeFazio).

Dear Chairman Neguse and Ranking Member Fulcher:

On behalf of the whitewater paddling community, American Whitewater writes to express our appreciation for holding a hearing on H.R. 980, *Southwestern Oregon Watershed and Salmon Protection Act of 2021*. The legislation will protect the exceptional water quality of rivers that flow through this landscape and maintain the recreational paddling experience that is of value to our membership. This legislation would withdraw certain land located in Curry County and Josephine County, Oregon, from all forms of entry, appropriation, or disposal under the public land laws, location, entry, and patent under the mining laws, and operation under the mineral leasing and geothermal leasing laws, and for other purposes.

About American Whitewater

American Whitewater is a national non-profit 501(c)(3) river conservation organization founded in 1954 with approximately 50,000 supporters, 6,500 dues-paying members, and 100 local-based affiliate clubs, representing whitewater enthusiasts across the nation. American Whitewater's mission is to protect and restore America's whitewater rivers and to

enhance opportunities to enjoy them safely. The organization is the primary advocate for the preservation and protection of whitewater rivers throughout the United States, and connects the interests of human-powered recreational river users with ecological and science-based data to achieve the goals within its mission. Our vision is that our nation's remaining wild and free-flowing rivers stay that way, our developed rivers are restored to function and flourish, that the public has access to rivers for recreation, and that river enthusiasts are active and effective river advocates. Our members live, work, and recreate in Curry and Josephine County and in the watersheds this bill seeks to protect.

Support for Southwestern Oregon Watershed and Salmon Protection Act of 2021 (H.R. 980)

American Whitewater strongly supports *Southwestern Oregon Watershed and Salmon Protection Act of 2021 (H.R. 980)*, introduced by Representative DeFazio and co-sponsored by Representative Huffman. We have supported this legislation since it was first introduced in 2013. The lands and rivers that would be permanently protected by this legislation are located in the Klamath Mountains in the southwest corner of Oregon. They are currently temporarily protected by an administrative withdrawal from settlement, sale, location, and entry under the public land laws, location and entry under the U.S. mining laws, and operation of the mineral and geothermal leasing laws.

On January 12th, 2017 the Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management announced the public land order withdrawing lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management for a 20-year term as Congress considers legislation to permanently withdraw these areas.¹ That legislation is before the Committee in the form of the *Southwestern Oregon Watershed and Salmon Protection Act of 2021 (H.R. 980)*. In a press release announcing the administrative withdrawal the Forest Service stated that, "this withdrawal does not prohibit or restrict any other authorized uses on these lands."² Similarly the legislation before the Committee does not negatively affect timber management, outdoor recreation, ability to respond to wildfire, access to public lands and waters, or other uses of these lands.

The area covered by this legislation is generally known as the Klamath Mountains and includes Rough and Ready Creek in the Illinois River watershed, Baldface Creek in the North Fork Smith watershed, and the Hunter Creek and North Fork Pistol River

¹ Public Land Order No. 7859; Withdrawal of National Forest System and Bureau of Land Management Public Lands in Southwestern Oregon; Oregon; 92 FR 4415-4416 (Jan. 13, 2017).

² BLM Announces Southwest Oregon Withdrawal: More than 100,000 acres of federal lands will be protected to safeguard critical watersheds, Release Date: Jan 12, 2017, Contact(s): Virginia Gibbons, Public Affairs Officer (541) 618-2113, <<https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/rogue-siskiyou/news-events/?cid=FSEPRD529625>>.

subwatersheds that flow directly to the Pacific. For whitewater paddlers, a highlight of the proposed area is the North Fork of the Smith River, which originates in the Kalmiopsis Wilderness and drains most of the area under consideration for withdrawal. The Wild and Scenic North Fork of the Smith River, originating with its headwaters in Oregon and flowing through California, is recognized as one of the nation's premiere whitewater runs, featuring clear blue water, high quality rapids, and spectacular scenery with unique ecological and geological features. The watershed is characterized by rare hydrologic and botanical resources, as well as unique opportunities for backcountry recreation. The Wild and Scenic Illinois River is a similarly unique river with its headwaters including Rough and Ready Creek. It is known for high quality whitewater, exceptional water quality, and the opportunity to experience a free-flowing river from the headwaters to the ocean. Wild rivers of this caliber and with such high water quality are exceptionally rare and highly valued by our membership.

Rough and Ready Creek and Baldface Creek offer unique opportunities for backcountry recreation but most important, also represent the headwaters of some of the most unique and scenic whitewater experiences in the country on the Wild and Scenic North Fork Smith River and Wild and Scenic Illinois River. Water flows downstream and the headwater protection this legislation will make permanent is important not only to the streams included but to all the river resources downstream including salmonid habitat. It is critical to note that these rivers represent a cluster of "salmon strongholds" of great significance to Tribes and communities in the bioregion and to sport and commercial fisheries.

On behalf of the whitewater paddling community, thank you again for holding this hearing. We look forward to continuing to work with you in support of conservation efforts that support outdoor recreation and the economic benefits that result from continued access and opportunities to enjoy clean and healthy free-flowing rivers.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'tho'keefe', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Thomas O'Keefe, PhD
Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director