

Congress eyes protecting Molalla River

Congressman Kurt Schrader introduces bill to call Molalla River 'wild and scenic'

By Bethany Monroe
MOLALLA PIONEER

The Molalla River will be considered by the U.S. House of Representatives for inclusion in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System, created by Congress in 1968 to preserve designated free-flowing rivers.

Congressman Kurt Schrader (D-OR) introduced the bill last Tuesday that would provide federal protections to preserve a 21.3 mile segment of the

Molalla River.

"The Molalla River is known for its awe-inspiring beauty and many recreational purposes," Schrader said in a press release. "It also serves as a water source for many citizens in southern Clackamas County. It deserves federal protection to ensure that future generations can experience the river's rich historical, cultural and recreational benefits."

In March, Congress passed legislation giving 86 rivers nationwide Wild and Scenic designations. There are currently 264 rivers recognized, including 59 in Oregon.

So far, the Molalla River is in a bill on its own, but Schrader said it will likely be grouped with other rivers seeking Wild and Scenic status. He said

he's unsure how long the process will take, but the next step for the bill is review by the Natural Resources Committee.

"I think with a new sheriff in town (President Obama) and a congress that is smart about our natural resources and understands our values, I think this will move along," Schrader said in an interview with the Pioneer.



Photo by Tim Maroney

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The Molalla River may soon be included among the nation's "wild and scenic" rivers.

River: Molalla River Alliance worked for past year on designation

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"The delegation seems very, very interested in the bill."

So far, Schrader said he has not heard any opposition to the bill.

"We've been in communication with all of the adjacent landowners, so they've had their concerns addressed," Schrader said.

If passed, the protections

would only apply to federally-owned lands, running about a quarter mile wide on each side of the river. Private property owners would not be impacted, he said.

Molalla River Alliance, a local nonprofit coalition comprised of more than 45 public and private groups, has been working for the past year to have the river federally recognized.

"Rep. Schrader has intro-

duced a potentially remarkable piece of legislation, passage of which will apply one of our nation's strongest conservation tools to protect the Molalla River," Molalla River Alliance President Mike Moody said in a press release. "It assures continued clean drinking water for the cities of Molalla and Canby while protecting pristine ecosystems and critical spawning and rearing habitat

needed by salmon and steelhead."

The bill has received support from the city of Molalla, Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, Oregon Wild and various other civic and nonprofit organizations.

"When a river is providing so much for a community — clean water, wildlife habitat, recreation opportunities, and more-it makes sense to protect that river," said Erik

Fernandez of the conservation group Oregon Wild. "The Molalla River is a beautiful river that provides so much to so many, and now fortunately Representative Schrader has introduced legislation to protect the river for future generations to enjoy."

Molalla Mayor Mike Clarke said that having the Wild and Scenic designation for the Molalla River could

also mean good things for the city.

"For Molalla, it's telling everybody that we do have the river and the government sees it as a pristine river and a recreational river that will be preserved," Clarke said. "It's kind of like an open invite to the city of Molalla, to come through and play and camp and come through our community at other times besides just the Buckeroo."