

# Schrader 'wild' about improving river

*Congressman Kurt Schrader tours Molalla River that 'wild and scenic' bill would protect*

By **Bethany Monroe**

*MOLALLA PIONEER*

Congressman Kurt Schrader (D-OR) visited the Molalla River Corridor last Wednesday to tour the river he is seeking to help protect through the federal Wild and Scenic Rivers designation.

If Schrader's bill passes, 21.3 miles of the Molalla River would join 59 other Oregon rivers and a total of 264 rivers nationwide included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. The special designation offers added protections to free-flowing rivers on public lands.

"We feel this effort represents a unique and unusual opportunity to safeguard and preserve the perpetuity of that river," Molalla River Alliance President Mike Moody said.

MRA, a nonprofit group that includes the city of Molalla, various residents along the river, Molalla Police Department, the Bureau of Land Management, Molalla RiverWatch, the Native Fish Society and multiple other organizations, has been working for more than a year to protect the river's natural resources and make the corridor a safer place for families to visit.

Gaining Wild and Scenic designation has been among the group's goals. Schrader agreed to sponsor the bill and introduced it to the House of Representatives in June.

"I'm here mostly to thank everyone for the groundwork they've done," Schrader told the MRA members in attendance on Wednesday. "What impressed me most about the project actually was the way you guys



*Photo by Bethany Monroe*

Erik Fernandez, a wilderness coordinator for Oregon Wild, discusses the Molalla River Corridor with Congressman Kurt Schrader during Schrader's visit to Molalla last Wednesday.

put it together."

MRA hosted Schrader's visit, meeting at Moody's riverfront home before taking a bus up further into the corridor for a short tour.

"These things can be controversial when they're proposed, but you did all the groundwork," Schrader said.

"You made the partnerships, you embraced the community, you talked to the different players. Frankly, you guys are a good example of how projects should be put together going forward."

Before MRA formed, the Molalla River Corridor had earned a reputa-

tion for being a place where underage drinking, drug activity and other offenses were problematic, MPD Chief Jerry Giger said.

A Weed and Seed grant has

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# River: BLM says Molalla River has unmatched community support behind it

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allowed MPD to team up with BLM and the sheriff's office to provide a regular law enforcement presence in the corridor — something that was sorely lacking in prior years.

MPD Sgt. Gordon White said that in the two summers they have had the patrols, there have not been any

drownings or traffic fatalities in the corridor. Vandalism and the overall crime rates have dropped as well.

"What I have found is you get a group of people that all have different ideas and different interests, but they all meet and come together and for a common goal," White said. "What has made it successful up here is what I call old fashioned police work.

Sitting down at these meetings with 40 to 45 people who live in this area and can tell me one on one where the problem is and what time of days and night, et cetera."

Another goal MRA is working toward is improving communications capabilities in the corridor.

"Hopefully someday we'll find a way to get some cell phone communications in

here, so if somebody has an emergency and needs help immediately, they don't need to drive five miles down the road to make a cell phone call," Molalla City Manager John Atkins said.

Zach Jarrett of BLM led the tour in the corridor, showing Schrader BLM project sites where they are working to restore damaged land.

"For a long time, it had been considered the garbage dump," said Kay Patteson of Molalla RiverWatch, a local group that orchestrates various clean-up efforts. "Over the years, that has substantially decreased."

BLM is working on a management plan for the corridor and has posted signs and roped off some sites to discourage public use in areas

they are trying to restore.

They are considering opening a centrally-located camping facility near the river in the future. So far, he said the projects have been mostly well-received by the public.

"We manage five river corridors within the Salem district and by far this corridor has the most community support," Jarrett said.