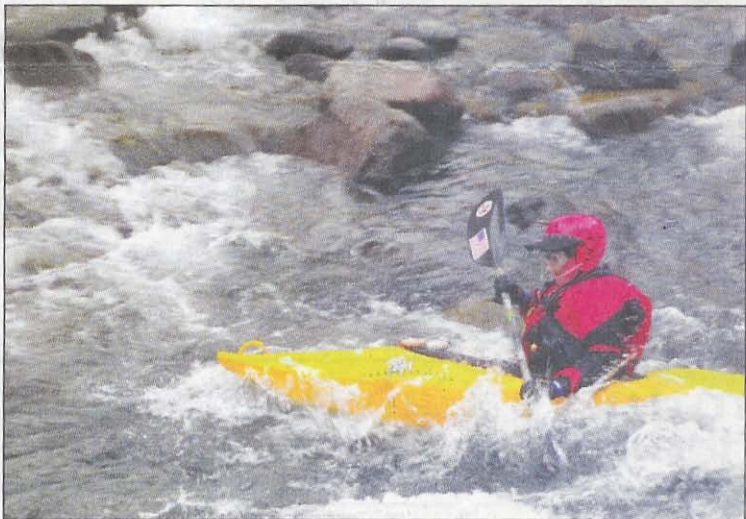


A kayaker navigates the Molalla River last spring. Environmental and recreational groups hope Congress will approve a bill to designate the river as Wild and Scenic.

*Photo by Tim Maroney*



# Congress may protect the Molalla River

*Congressional bill to designate Molalla River as 'wild and scenic' gets subcommittee hearing*

**By Bethany Monroe**

*MOLALLA PIONEER*

Molalla River Alliance President Mike Moody spent last Thursday in Washington, D.C., testifying in a Natural Resources Subcommittee hearing on behalf of Congressman Kurt Schrader's bill to include 21.3 miles of the Molalla River as a federally-recognized Wild and Scenic River.



**SCHRADER**

The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act was created by Congress in 1968 to preserve rivers with outstanding natural, cultural and recreational values. As a Wild and Scenic River, the Molalla River would be protected from dams and other water projects

that would interfere with its natural flow. The federally-owned lands bordering the river would also be protected.

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# River: Nobody knows exactly how long process will take

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"It went very well. I think we got our point across," Moody said on Thursday after the hearing. "I first of all explained to them who we are and how the alliance had come together ... There was a lot of talk about this collaboration of groups in the alliance. People are kind of curious about it."

The Molalla River Alliance is a nonprofit organization formed in 2008 that includes members from various environmental and recreational organizations and government agencies, as well as local residents.

At the hearing, Moody said he explained MRA's reasons for seeking a Wild and Scenic designation for the Molalla River. Their first priority is protecting the river's water quality, he said, since it is a resource relied upon by Molalla and Canby citizens.

Other goals he discussed included the Wild and Scenic designation's potential for boosting tourism and enhancing the community as well as benefits to endangered fish species. He also highlighted community support for the river and the fact that there is currently no organized opposition to the bill.

"Because it's non-controversial, it should have a good chance of being approved," Moody said.

Bureau of Land Management Director Bob Abbey also attended to voice his support of the bill, Moody said. If the 21.3 miles of the Molalla River proposed for inclusion in the bill are named Wild and Scenic, the protections would only apply to publicly-owned lands.

Oregon Senators Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden have proposed a companion Molalla River bill for the Senate to consider.

"The nice thing about what we're doing is we have complete support of our delegation," Moody

said. "There's no contention. We've found things common to everyone that we could all agree on."

In Congress, that's often not the case. The Molalla River bill hearing was delayed for several hours, Moody said, due to a separate bill out of Utah that drew heavy opposition from the Utah delegation.

The next step for the Molalla River bill is to enter the mark up process, where it will be edited and, if approved by the committee, it will then be presented to the House of Representatives, said James

Atkin, the communications director for Schrader's Washington, D.C. office.

"Today was another big step toward the process," Atkin said on Thursday afternoon. "The congressman remains committed to pushing this through. It's a great community cooperation story. I think the best part about this is the lack of opposition."

Moody said he was only asked a few questions by subcommittee members following his testimony, although he was prepared for more.

"I've been studying for

weeks," Moody said. "I read everything I could on Wild and Scenic. I didn't want to get tripped up."

It's tough to predict how long it will be before the bill reaches the House for a vote, but Moody said it could happen before the end of this year.

The related bill that will be considered by the Senate has not yet entered the hearing process, but Moody said he is willing to make another trip to Washington, D.C. to testify for that hearing, if requested by Wyden and Merkley.