

Schrader's river bill closer to reality

Bill sponsored by Kurt Schrader passed by House; would protect 21.3 miles of Molalla River

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MOLALLA PIONEER

The U.S. House of Representatives voted 292-133 last Thursday to add federal protections to 21.3 miles

of the Molalla River under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

Congressman Kurt Schrader (D-Ore.) sponsored the bill at the request of the Molalla River Alliance. He credits "overwhelming support from the community"



SCHRADER

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as the reason the bill passed.

The Molalla River Alliance includes various individuals and groups, from riverside landowners and fishing enthusiasts to environmentalists and government agencies, who all share a mutual interest in the Molalla River.

"This really shows what can happen when a community comes together and decides to take action," Mike Moody, President of the Molalla River Alliance, said in a press release. "This would not have been possible without Congressman Schrader's persistent efforts

and the overwhelming support of the Molalla community and other stakeholders. Thanks to these efforts, we are on the verge of ensuring that the clean drinking water of 20,000 citizens in Molalla and Canby can never be compromised while promoting a safe and healthy environment that encourages diverse enjoyment of the recreation corridor, including tourism and family-friendly activities."

Oregon Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley have introduced a companion Molalla River bill, which now awaits mark-ups before reaching the Senate floor.

The House spent about an

hour discussing the bill before the vote on Thursday.

The bill received unanimous support from Democrats and did not have any organized opposition, although it did receive 133 "no" votes from Republicans.

However, it wasn't simply a party-line vote. Oregon Congressman Greg Walden and 39 of his fellow Republicans voted in favor of the bill. Five Democrats and four Republicans did not vote.

Schrader said that some opponents do not support any proposal to add a river to the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, because they disagree

with federal public land holdings. Some opponents also had concerns that the bill would take timberland out of production.

Schrader said logging is not generally done on Wild and Scenic Rivers land, but is not prohibited.

"I worked closely with the forest products industry and the community to make sure we didn't close off any economic opportunity going forward," Schrader said. "It just gives it a lot more protections than it would otherwise."

Typical activities in the Molalla River Corridor, such as hiking, kayaking and swimming, will not be

impacted by the bill, Schrader said.

"It basically makes sure that this section of the river is not open for any federal development," Schrader said.

A possible benefit to having the Wild and Scenic designation is that it could improve the area's chances of being approved for grant funding for projects such as continued law enforcement efforts in the corridor, Schrader said.

The National Wild and Scenic Rivers System has been in place since 1968 and was created to preserve free-flowing rivers with outstanding natural, cultural and

recreational values, according to the press release from Schrader's office.

"The Molalla River is nothing short of a natural treasure in my state," Schrader said in the press release. "Not only are we preserving its awe-inspiring beauty for future generations, but we are also bringing badly needed economic benefits to our region through increased tourism and recreational opportunities. More visitors to the area mean more business for local hotels, restaurants and recreational providers; and more business is exactly what Oregon needs right now."