

Why 'Wild and Scenic' for the Molalla River?

As reported in last week's *Molalla Pioneer*, Wild and Scenic Rivers legislation for the Molalla River was passed in the U.S. House of Representatives.

The vote was an overwhelming 292-133. This bill was initiated and led by the efforts of locally based Molalla River Alliance and its members. And while this is a major step in protecting this storied river, to become law our companion bill first must be passed by the U.S. Senate.

Misunderstanding and confusion seem to accompany this legislation. I'd like to clarify what these protections will, and won't, do for our river.

Passed in 1968, the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act established one of our nation's strongest conservation tools for rivers. To be included, a river or stretch of

river must be free-flowing and adjacent land must possess certain scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural or other similar values.

These are known as 'outstandingly remarkable values' (ORVs). Also, a river must be designated as wild, scenic or recreational. If passed, the Molalla River likely will be designated recreational.

Rivers designated wild and scenic are afforded specific protections, including preserving

water quality. This is vital because the Molalla River is the primary source of drinking water for more than 20,000 citizens of Molalla and Canby.

In addition, Wild and Scenic designation:

- Protects existing uses of the river and its ORVs;
- Prohibits federally-licensed dams or any federal project if it would negatively impact the river's ORVs; and
- Establishes a minimum ¼-mile protected buffer on both sides of the river.

I'd like to clarify common misconceptions about wild and scenic rivers.

(1) Access to and enjoyment of the river will be severely limited.

False. Public access to and recreation, whether it be fishing, boating, etc., will not be changed. In fact, the wild and scenic status seeks to protect those activities.

Recreational use of public lands adjacent to a wild and scenic river will continue as before. Hunting, camping and other legal land uses will be allowed and will continue to be regulated under existing state laws.

(2) The government will take ownership of riverside land when a river becomes protected.

False. Existing ownership of

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Guest column

Mike Moody

President
Molalla River Alliance

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land will most likely remain unchanged. The government usually acquires riverside lands through voluntary purchase or easements.

The use of "eminent domain" is very rare having been used on only four of the more than 250 rivers in the national system.

(3) My rights as a private landowner will disappear with wild and scenic rivers. False. The act carries no authority to control the use of privately owned land, even if private lands are included within the boundaries of the protected river corridor. Landowners will be able to use their land just as

they had before designation.

(4) Current land uses will be stopped along a newly designated river. False. Most current land uses, public and private, will continue after designation. Remember, the goal of wild and scenic designation is to "protect and enhance" existing values and uses of the river and surrounding lands.

(5) There will be no future development of land alongside a designated river. False. Wild and

scenic rivers legislation does not affect private landowners' ability to develop privately owned lands within the designated area.

(6) The federal government will control zoning of private lands along a wild and scenic river. False. The act carries no authority to affect the zoning of private lands. That authority is reserved for state and local governments.

Besides benefiting our local

economy from increased tourism, wild and scenic designation represents a rare opportunity to safeguard and preserve, in perpetuity, an ecological, geological and historical treasure that affords myriad recreational opportunities to Oregonians.

Hopefully, the Senate will agree.

For more information about the Molalla River Alliance, visit their Web site at: www.molallariveralliance.org.