

January 7th, 2022

The Honorable Senator Wyden  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510



**TRAILKEEPERS  
OF OREGON**

The Honorable Representative Blumenauer  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D. C. 20515

Subject: Legislative Concepts for Mount Hood and the Columbia River Gorge

Dear Senator Wyden and Representative Blumenauer:

On behalf of Trailkeepers of Oregon (TKO), we would like to thank you for your ongoing work in protecting Mount Hood and the Gorge, including the new vision for recreation and restoration in the newly released legislative concept. We strongly support this pivot toward protecting special places while also improving sustainable recreation opportunities. Key components are listed below, making the proposal so timely and needed.

***Expanding the Mount Hood National Recreation Area*** with special attention to:

- Funding and mandating a 2-3 year timeline for updating the Mount Hood Forest Plan and Gorge management plan to reflect the expanded NRA.
- Expanding recreation, equitable access to public lands and a new vision for a sustainable transportation system on Mount Hood and in the Gorge.
- As part of the updated Gorge plan, we also support a unified trailhead pass program that spans the federal and state recreation sites there.

***Public safety on public lands*** elements of the legislative concept, including supportive funding for local law enforcement to assist in providing regular patrolling along the Mount Hood Loop and in the Gorge. However, we would also like to see funding and a vision for self-enforcing features and technology at trailheads, since patrols can never provide the level of security needed over such a large area.

***A safer Mount Hood Loop*** with the rapid growth in recreation has made US 26 and OR 35 increasingly dangerous for hikers accessing trailheads and cyclists touring the loop route or doing bike-and-hike loops, a growing interest. As the Historic Columbia River Highway State Trail nears completion in the Gorge, this legislation should focus on completing a safe route around the mountain, completing the loop.

***Improving and expanding our trails and trailheads*** in the aftermath of the 2011 Dollar Lake fire on Mount Hood, 2017 Eagle Creek fire in the Gorge and the 2020 Historic Labor Day fires, TKO has been busy working with the Forest Service to help recover and maintain trails impacted by fire. Our stewardship events have brought thousands of volunteers working thousands of volunteer hours to bring trails like Angels Rest and Oneonta Creek in the Gorge and Vista Ridge on Mount Hood back for the public. We are turning to the fire-affected trails within the Clackamas River Ranger District and Santiam River corridor in 2022.

While our crew leaders and volunteers are passionate and mighty, we still need more capacity from the Forest Service to fully realize the needed restoration work, especially to bring new trail opportunities to reality. We have proposed new trails in both the Gorge and on Mount Hood that would not only help accommodate the overwhelming demand we have seen in recent years, but also provide more trail variety to ensure that we are removing physical, cultural and racial barriers so that everyone can enjoy and help care for their public lands.

**What should the new FS capacity look like** and what we would like to see in the legislation:

- Funding for full-time trail crews to help us care for our existing trails.
- Funding for the planning and environmental work needed to begin building new trails.
- Funding to modernize trailheads, including a review of the effectiveness of the Northwest Forest Pass and equity barriers that it creates, specifically for people of color and those with limited English proficiency.
- The creation of a joint venture stewardship academy for professional trail stewardship training to establish a pipeline for a diverse staff and activate community volunteers in recreation management skills for trail building and volunteer engagement, ultimately building a community to steward our public lands.

**Concept map:** we strongly support the expansion of the Mount Hood National Recreation Area, with the following specific comments:

- We are pleased the Lolo Pass Road corridor is included as one of the most important recreation corridors on the mountain, with great potential for new trails and trailheads.
- We would like to see the southern boundary of the expanded NRA extended to include the Clackamas Corridor to at least the Collowash confluence. We feel it critical, given the impacts that the 2020 Riverside Fire had on these trail systems in the Clackamas basin. TKO maintains the Clackamas River Trail, long-designated a National Scenic Trail.
- We would like to see the entirety of the Badger Creek Wilderness included in the expanded NRA to ensure it is reasonably managed by the Forest Service. Because of the remoteness of this wilderness, it has been difficult for volunteer crews to maintain, and has developed a worrisome maintenance backlog.
- We understand why the The Dalles watershed was left out of the expanded NRA but suggest that the upper Dog River section (which does not drain into the Mill Creek reservoirs) be included in the NRA in recognition of the rapidly growing hiking and mountain biking interest in this area.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment and for your leadership in creating a new, more sustainable vision for Mount Hood and the Columbia Gorge.

Sincerely,



Steve Kruger  
TKO Executive Director