



THEODORE R. KULONGOSKI
Governor

October 15, 2009

The Honorable Tom Vilsack
Secretary of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Vilsack:

Thank you for your efforts in your new position as steward of our nation's many natural treasures. We recently celebrated the long awaited passage of the Omnibus Public Lands Act of 2009 this spring. With the addition of 202,000 acres of new Wilderness protections this legislation brought to Oregon, now 4% of our great state is permanently protected as Wilderness. At the same time, the threats to our natural treasures continue. I am writing to you today in regard to the reinstatement of the Clinton mining withdrawal for the Siskiyou Wild Rivers area (66FR 6664).

I would like to draw your attention to the Siskiyou Wild Rivers area and concerns regarding increased mining in the region. This southwest Oregon landscape is the most unique and biologically diverse region of our state and is home to over 100 species of plants found nowhere else on earth. Some of our healthiest runs of salmon are found here, as well as Oregon's only redwood forests. With climate change increasing the pressures on plant and animal species, this area is a critical lifeboat providing intact habitat over a range of elevations from north to south. One of your predecessors, Bruce Babbitt, stated: "I think this is probably the most important, the most biologically significant, unprotected landscape in the American West."

In January of 2001, the Clinton Administration proposed a mineral withdrawal for the area. However, the proposed withdrawal was not fulfilled by the Bush Administration. Without this withdrawal, the 1872 mining law is the guiding rule. I believe this law needs to be updated to reflect modern standards of environmental protection as well as tax payer protection. I ask that you reinstate the proposed mineral withdrawal for the Siskiyou Wild Rivers and work with Oregon's congressional delegation to further protections for this area..

In early 2008, I wrote Oregon's congressional delegation in support of Wilderness protection for the Siskiyou Wild Rivers area surrounding the existing Kalmiopsis Wilderness. The need for protection in this area has only grown since that letter was written. California recently banned the use of suction dredge mining, the same type of destructive mining that is used in southwest Oregon. We are very concerned that the suction dredge miners are now heading for Oregon.

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As stated in the Clinton withdrawal in 2001:

“The purpose of the proposed withdrawal is to protect the nationally significant ecologic and biologic diversity of the Siskiyou Wild Rivers area which also contain outstanding scenic and recreation values, and special status plant and animal species and their habitats while it is determined whether special management designation for the area is warranted and to assess the views of the public on such a designation.”

A mining withdrawal would not affect valid mining claims. It would give the managing federal agencies time to sort out the invalid claims as well as provide Oregon’s congressional delegation time to address the need for wilderness protection for the Siskiyou Wild Rivers. I ask that the Administration reissue the 2001 proposed mineral withdrawal for the Siskiyou Wild River area to ensure that these special public resources are not further jeopardized while we seek to resolve the issue of protection.

Sincerely,



THEODORE R. KULONCOSKI
Governor

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c: The Honorable Ken Salazar
Oregon Congressional Delegation