

RESOLUTION OF THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF DOUGLAS COUNTY, OREGON
In Support of the River Democracy Act
Resolution No. 2021-005

Whereas only 2,173 miles out of Oregon’s 110,994 miles of rivers and streams are currently protected as part of the Wild and Scenic Rivers system, and

Whereas Senators Wyden and Merkley introduced the River Democracy Act in February 2021 to protect an additional 4,700 of Oregon’s waterways, and

Whereas the citizens of Oregon nominated the rivers and streams to be added to the Wild and Scenic Rivers system, and

Whereas the River Democracy Act ensures that river management plans are developed in collaboration with Native American Tribes, and

Whereas protecting these waterways will boost rural jobs and economies and reduce risks from the now common catastrophic wildfires, and

Whereas Douglas County’s economy is dependent on preserving our waterways,

Therefore, We, the Democratic Central Committee of Douglas County, Oregon, resolve as follows:

We fully endorse and support the River Democracy Act and urge the Congress to adopt this important legislation promptly.

Resolution as submitted by the Platform and Resolutions Committee *_adopted_* by the Democratic Party of Douglas County as approved by the Douglas County Central Committee on the *_28th_* day of *_October_*.

Recommendation: Endorse with Action

Letters to the Editor and to Biden, Harris, Wyden, Merkley, DeFazio and other elected representatives

Recommend for addition to DPO Platform

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The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act was Signed into law on October 2, 1968, by President Lyndon B. Johnson to protect the country’s “outstandingly remarkable scenic, recreational, geologic, fish and wildlife, historic, cultural” waterways.ⁱ

The River Democracy act was introduced by Senators Wyden and Merkley on February 3, 2021. The Act adds almost 4,700 miles of Oregon rivers and streams to the national Wild and Scenic Rivers system, the largest expansion since 1968. Wyden solicited 15,000 nominations from 2,500 Oregonians in this effort to protect the state’s waterways. He argues that this expansion will boost rural jobs and economies by improving drinking water and expanding recreational opportunities as well as reduce catastrophic wildfire risks. About 2,173 miles of Oregon waterways are currently designated in the Wild and Scenic Rivers system, only a small fraction of the state’s 110,994 miles of rivers and streams.ⁱⁱ

The Act contains the following provisionsⁱⁱⁱ:

- Designates nearly 4,700 miles of rivers in all corners of Oregon as “Wild and Scenic Rivers” to expand recreation access and boost local economies, protect drinking water for families, reduce wildfire threats, and sustain endangered fish and wildlife species;
- Requires federal land managers to assess wildfire risks in Wild and Scenic River corridors, implement a plan to reduce wildfire risks to homes and businesses near Wild and Scenic Rivers, assist local governments mitigate wildfire risks and restore water quality should a fire strike near a Wild and Scenic River;
- Encourages federal land managers to develop river management plans in collaboration with Native American tribes and ensures Native American tribes have a voice in how rivers are managed; and
- Ensures that only federal lands are affected by Wild and Scenic designations, while protecting private property rights, water rights and existing permits and rights of way on federal lands.

Earth Economics reports that Oregon’s outdoor economy supports 224,000 jobs statewide and generates \$15.6 billion in consumer spending, supporting hunting, fishing, among other forms of outdoor recreation and the many small businesses that are part of the recreation economy.^{iv}

Opponents in some rural counties are concerned that the additional designations of wild and scenic rivers will “will lead to greater restrictions for timber harvest, livestock grazing and outdoor recreation that power their local economies” and argue that many of the proposed waterways are intermittent, seasonal flows and do not qualify. The American Forest Resources Institute, a timber industry group, makes the same argument, asserting that just 15% of nominated waterways in the bill are rivers.^v

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Environmental groups and Wyden respond to this argument by pointing out that “small and ephemeral streams” are allowed under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and are critical parts of our waterways system, providing drinking water for 1.7 million Oregonians.^{vi}

This legislation has been endorsed by Floyd Prozanski and many other Oregon legislators, local elected officials, tribal leaders, and business owners.^{vii}

ⁱ <https://www.rivers.gov/wsr50/files/general-wild-and-scenic-rivers-infographic.pdf>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.wyden.senate.gov/news/press-releases/wyden-and-merkley-introduce-legislation-to-protect-4700-miles-of-oregon-rivers-nominated-by-nearly-2500-oregonians>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.wyden.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/River%20Democracy%20Act%20of%202021%20One%20Pager.pdf>

^{iv} <https://www.americanrivers.org/2021/03/everything-you-need-to-know-about-oregons-river-democracy-act/>

^v https://www.capitalpress.com/ag_sectors/livestock/eastern-oregon-counties-object-to-river-democracy-act/article_e8a9980c-ef00-11eb-841f-d3310596f2d0.html

^{vivi} https://www.capitalpress.com/ag_sectors/livestock/eastern-oregon-counties-object-to-river-democracy-act/article_e8a9980c-ef00-11eb-841f-d3310596f2d0.html

^{vii} <https://www.wyden.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/River%20Democracy%20Act%20of%202021%20Supporter%20Quotes.pdf>

Other References:

<https://www.wyden.senate.gov/download/river-democracy-act-of-2021-bill-text>

<https://www.wyden.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/022021%20Oregon%20Proposed%20WSR%20Map.pdf>

https://www.nrtoday.com/opinion/letters/letter-the-river-democracy-act-represents-the-best-in-us/article_47476ede-a363-58ad-9744-f9f750dcad00.html