

News from Congressman Les AuCoin

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

AUCCOIN WORKS ON RIVER PROTECTION; BACKS BILL TO PRESERVE ARCTIC WILDERNESS

WASHINGTON -- Oregon Congressman Les AuCoin, one of the principal architects of last year's Columbia Gorge Protection Act, has taken three significant steps to preserve and protect valuable natural resources for future generations.

After a personal walking tour of portions of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, AuCoin announced his decision to support wilderness designation for the coastal plain of the Refuge.

Next, AuCoin and Fourth District Congressman Peter DeFazio announced plans to introduce House legislation to grant special recognition to dozens of Oregon rivers, paralleling similar Senate legislation by Senator Mark Hatfield.

And most recently, the First District Congressman and DeFazio introduced a measure to name a 19-mile stretch of the Upper Klamath in southern Oregon a National Wild and Scenic River. "This is simply an outstanding stretch of river, with resources unmatched in the west, and we're ready to give national recognition to this tremendous area," AuCoin said.

Wild and Scenic rivers must be kept free-flowing, and impoundments such as dams, reservoirs and hydroelectric facilities are banned from them.

The AuCoin/DeFazio bill would add the river segment, including a quarter-mile corridor on either side of the river itself, to the list of 74 wild and scenic rivers in America. The 19-mile stretch begins after the John Boyle Dam and runs southwest to the Copco Dam reservoir.

The Upper Klamath would join segments of the Snake, the Illinois, the Rogue and Owyhee Rivers as Oregon's National Wild and Scenic rivers. The Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management would manage the area.

On the multi-river bill, AuCoin, Hatfield and DeFazio are seeking a review of other rivers running through the state's public lands to determine further additions to the National Wild and Scenic River network. The Oregon lawmakers will look at several dozen rivers and evaluate their suitability for wild, scenic or recreational designation. A bill covering the affected rivers will be introduced in both the Senate and the House in January, AuCoin said.

The bill AuCoin and DeFazio will introduce in the House would designate, or require studies of, at least 27 rivers in Oregon. The bill will include those rivers the U.S. Forest Service has indicated meet the minimum criteria for wild, scenic or recreation status in the 13 draft forest plans currently being released for public comment.

"Oregon's rivers are as precious a natural resource as its forests and beaches, and it's time for us to decide how best to manage that important river resource," AuCoin said.

Under the terms of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, wild rivers are those which are free from dams or diversions, have undeveloped shorelines and are generally inaccessible except by trail. Scenic rivers are similar to wild rivers except they are accessible in places by roads. Recreational rivers are those which are readily accessible by roads, may have some development along their shorelines and may have been dammed in the past.

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Les AuCoin

“Oregon’s rivers are as precious a natural resource as its forests and beaches . . . it’s time to decide how to manage that resource.”

—Congressman Les AuCoin

On another environmental front, AuCoin recently became the 100th cosponsor of a bill to designate the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge as wilderness.

The Interior Department has recommended opening up the coastal plain to oil and gas leasing. Since the proposal is "among the most controversial I have seen in my 13 years in Congress," AuCoin said, he visited the coastal plain in September to review the issues first-hand.

"The coastal plain is a spectacular place, remarkably free from human intrusion and enormously rich with plant and animal life, AuCoin said. After reviewing U.S. energy policy relating to ANWR, AuCoin said he is "absolutely convinced that wilderness is the appropriate use of this tremendous land."