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Kavita Heyn

Associate director of conservation for American Rivers

Local organizations want the Molalla River on protected list

Molalla River Alliance trying to convince federal government to help preserve the river

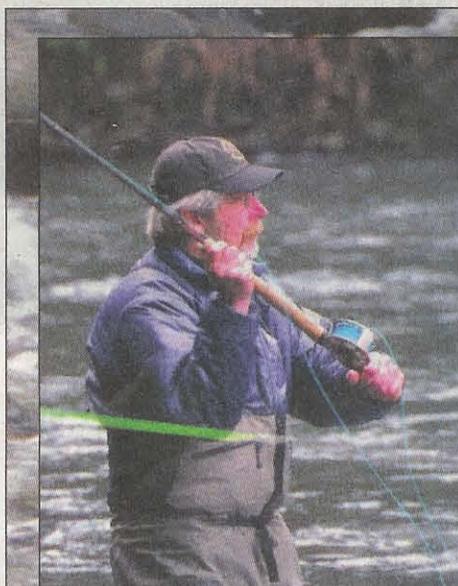
**Story By Bethany Monroe
Photos by Tim Maronay**

MOLALLA PIONEER

Eleven Oregon rivers received federal Wild and Scenic Rivers designations last week through passage of the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009.

"The rivers will be protected from clear-cut logging and development and those rivers will be available for people to enjoy and use for fish and wildlife," Oregon Wild wilderness coordinator Erik Fernandez said. "I think protecting our natural areas as wilderness is what makes Oregon a great place to live, work and raise a family."

The Molalla River was not included among the designated rivers, but the Molalla River Alliance, a nonprofit coalition of more than 45 private and public organizations, has been working toward gaining federal protection for the river for the past year.



The Molalla River is used for a variety of recreational activities. (Left) Tom Derry does some fishing in the Molalla River. (Below) Virgil Foster kayaks through the Mama Bear Rapids, about 10 miles past the Glen Avon Bridge.

MRA president Mike Moody said the group has received positive feedback from Senators Jeff Merkley and Ron Wyden and Representative Kurt Schrader on their proposal to grant the Molalla River a Wild and Scenic designation. Moody hopes to hear back soon on plans for introducing

the bill to Congress.

Kavita Heyn, associate director of conservation for American Rivers, said she is hopeful that a Molalla River bill will move quickly through the legislative process since it has strong support through multiple agencies and has so far not raised opposition.

Most of the 22 miles of the Molalla River proposed for the Wild and Scenic designation run through Bureau of Land Management lands, Heyn said.

"It will in no way impact private property owners if it's passed," Moody said. "It really only pertains to public lands."

Heyn said the Molalla River is a salmon stream and is the drinking water source for both Molalla and Canby. The federal designation would prohibit building to allow the river to remain free-flowing.

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would also restrict mining or extracting and logging on half-mile buffers of land along the river banks. If the Molalla River is designated Wild and Scenic, it will impact 7,000 acres of land, Heyn said.

Recognition as a Wild and Scenic River could help draw tourism to the Molalla area, Heyn said.

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fit the local economy. But at the same time, you want to make sure the river is protected when it receives more use."

The government has been designating Wild and Scenic Rivers since 1968, Heyn said.

Last week's legislation added 86 rivers across the country for a total of 264. Oregon alone now has 59 Wild and Scenic Rivers.

"Oregon leads the country in Wild and Scenic Rivers," Heyn said. "We have far more than any other state."

Oregon's new Wild and Scenic Rivers include por-

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tions of South Fork Clackamas, Eagle Creek, Middle Fork Hood River, South Fork Roaring River, Zig Zag River, Fifteen Mile Creek, East Fork Hood River, Collawash River, Fish Creek and the North and

South Fork Elk Rivers.

Senator Wyden, along with Representatives Earl Blumenauer and Peter DeFazio were all sponsors in the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009. The rest of Oregon's delega-

tion in Washington D.C. was also in support of the bill, Heyn said.

Rivers in Idaho, Arizona, Wyoming, Utah, Vermont, Massachusetts and California were also included in the bill.