



Molalla River Alliance

Newsletter 9

Molalla River nominated for state scenic waterway

In a unanimous vote, the State Parks and Recreation Commission has endorsed staff recommendations to nominate the upper Molalla River as an Oregon Scenic Waterway.

The action came as the Commission met in Astoria on Nov. 19, its final meeting of the year. This is the first time in 26 years that an Oregon river has been nominated for official Scenic Waterway status.

“There is overwhelming public support for this nomination,” Molalla River Alliance President John Atkins noted in testimony before the commission. “Out of 260 comments submitted to the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department concerning the proposed scenic river designation, only two were negative.”

In addition to the Molalla River Alliance, endorsements were submitted by American Whitewater, Molalla River

Watch Watershed Council, and the Native Fish Society.

“We are grateful to the ORPD staff for its careful and detailed research as well as its thorough outreach in assessing community support for a scenic waterway designation



View of the Molalla River as it cuts through Horse Creek Canyon.

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Save the date

Our next general membership meeting is **Friday, April 24, 2015**, at the Molalla Retreat, 9 a.m. to Noon. As usual, we have a packed agenda on tap and good stuff to eat and drink at the refreshments table.

Working to preserve our river

By John Atkins
MRA President



As we launch into a new year, your Molalla River Alliance is rolling up its sleeves to help shape a recreation management plan for the Upper Molalla River.

This is a required step in the process of conferring Oregon Scenic Waterway status on our treasured river.

How this nomination came about is attributable to the stewardship division staff of the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department.

After a 26-year hiatus, the department resumed activities authorized under the state's scenic waterway program, beginning with an inventory of Oregon rivers appearing to meet the criteria laid out in the scenic waterway statutes.

This resulted in a list of approximately 80 river segments. Out of this number, three rivers were selected, based on their geographic diversity and the department's staffing capabilities, to undergo detailed waterway assessments: sections of the Molalla, Chetco, and Grande Ronde Rivers.

After further analysis, the Chetco and Molalla River study areas were found to meet the required Scenic Waterway eligibility criteria and have significant public support for designation. (The Grande Ronde River study area did not measure up in certain areas was not recommended for further action.)

To qualify as a scenic waterway, a river or

segment must be 1) free flowing, 2) be scenically pleasing, 3) possess natural and recreation values of outstanding quality and 4) be "large enough to sustain substantial recreation use and to accommodate existing uses without undue impairment of the natural values of the resource or quality of the recreation experience."

There is one more task to be carried out before Scenic Waterway status can be conferred on the Molalla River: developing a basic management plan for the 13½ miles of the Molalla River upstream from the Glen Avon Bridge.

The OPRD staff plans to work with an advisory committee consisting of direct stakeholders and local Scenic Waterway proponents to complete this work.

The MRA intends to dive right in. You can, too, if you're so inclined. To get involved, email me at j3atkins.ja@gmail.com or contact the Oregon Parks and Recreation Dept. at scenic.waterways@oregon.gov.

The Oregon Scenic Waterway program is very similar to the federal Wild and Scenic River program. The aims of both are to preserve the nation's outstanding rivers for future generations to enjoy, while respecting private property rights.

Prospects for gaining federal wild and scenic recognition for the Molalla lost ground, regrettably, with legislation proposed by Sen. Ron Wyden and supported by Sen. Jeff Merkley left stranded as the 113th Congress adjourned.

We can be confident that this setback will be remedied in due course, thanks to the ongoing efforts of our Oregon congressional delegation.

Meantime we'll be working to get the Molalla River added to Oregon's list of State Scenic Waterways.

— John

Molalla Scenic Waterway: management plan next

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on the Molalla River,” Atkins said.

Studies carried out by the ORPD found that that the proposed waterway segment on the upper Molalla clearly meets all physical standards that the scenic waterway statues require.

Its report recommends to the Commission that the studies and the report be forwarded to the Governor and to the Oregon Water Resources Department and to “... return with proponent-supported management plans by December 31, 2015 as a precondition for recommending the stretches of the ...Molalla River specified in the qualification reports for scenic waterway designation.”

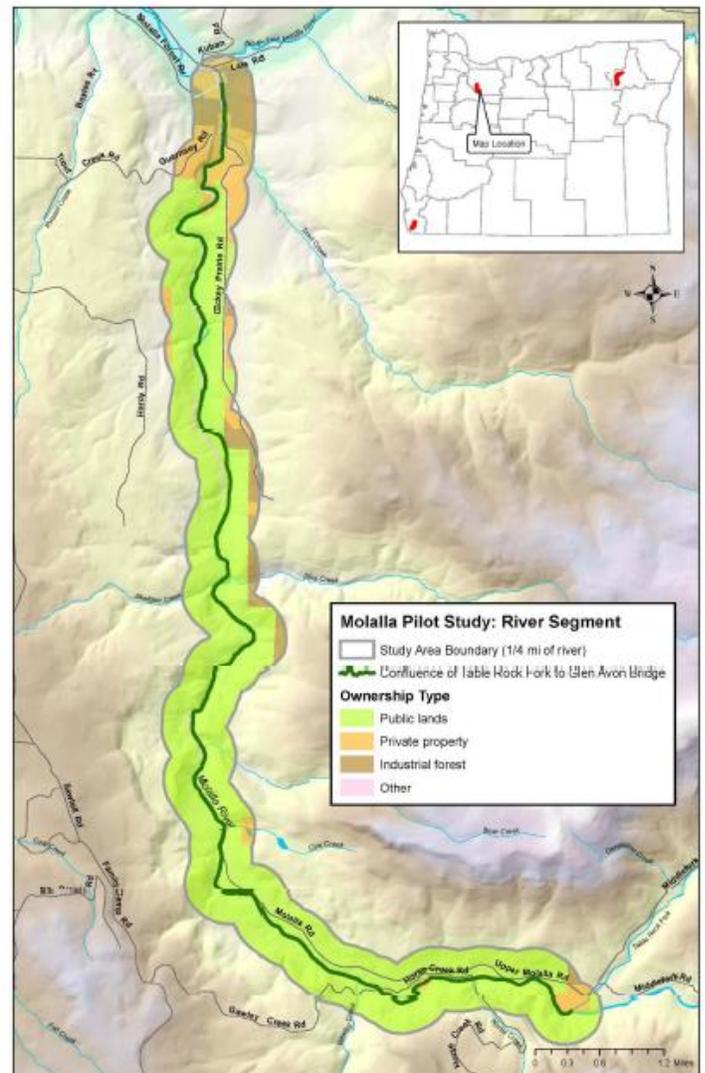
Next Steps

This means that before the scenic waterway designation can become final, by action of Governor John Kitzhaber, a management plan must be developed by the ORPD staff in collaboration with local stakeholders, government agencies, and interested organizations.

The MRA fully supports these recommendations and looks forward to working with the OPRD staff in preparing a management plan leading to the designation of the Upper Molalla as a State Scenic Waterway.

Under state law, scenic waterway status respects private property rights while aiming to protect stretches of Oregon’s most scenic rivers.

In the case of the upper Molalla River, almost all of the 13½ miles of river nominated for scenic status—from the Glen Avon Bridge upstream to the confluence of the Table Rock and Copper Creek forks—are already in public ownership and are managed by the federal Bureau of Land Management.



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Below Glen Avon

Not far below the bridge at Glen Avon, the big cedar grove is a good spot to swing a fly across the Molalla River for wild winter steelhead.

Cast into the tailout at the foot of the riffles where the current slows and deepens. Under the broken shadows search for a dark shape idling in the flow, giving up glints of chrome.

With luck, a tingling on the line signals the interest of an unseen quarry. Pulse quickening, the angler gathers in line and casts once more into the head of the pool.

The fly-tip settles into the flow and sinks under the shadows. In a breath, the tingling resumes, abruptly changing to a violent strike that rips line from the reel and bends the long rod double.

Water erupts in a glittering ballet of leaps and pirouettes by a silver dancer. The angler holds steady, keeping up tension, losing then gaining ground in the insistent slowing cycle of tugs and runs.



Tom Derry, MRA Board Member and Development Director for the Native Fish Society, with a bright 10-pound Molalla steelhead.

As the contest subsides, the gleaming prize is drawn to shore. Until this moment, the chrome-bright spawner had eluded a gauntlet of predators.

Kingfishers, ospreys and river otters all missed their chances. Swarms of cormorants at the mouth of the Columbia River also failed, as did the ravenous sea lions and bait-casters on the hogline at the foot of Willamette Falls.

Sleek and muscular from her time at sea, among the fittest of her generation, the wild hen now lies at the angler's feet, played out.

With care the angler slips the unbarbed hook from her lip and guides the fish into the current, face forward to catch the oxygen-charged water in her moving gills.

Gradually, the hen revives. She eases away from the angler's grasp to quieter water, there to rest and recover before resuming her long journey to the spawning beds miles above the bridge at Glen Avon.

--John Atkins

Mark Schmidt named service award winner

Mark Schmidt, a lifelong resident of the Molalla River Basin, has been named winner of the Ryan Morgan Service Award by the Molalla River Alliance.



A skilled fisherman and fly designer, Schmidt is a founding member of the MRA and chairs its Science Committee.

For many years, he has served as the Molalla River Steward for the Native Fish Society, an MRA affiliate.

“Year in and year out, Mark hikes miles of the upper Molalla River to conduct fish surveys,” said John Atkins, MRA President. “He plants salmon carcasses in the river to provide nutrients for newly spawned fish. He works to restore streamside habitat with native plantings. He’s one of the Molalla River’s best friends.”

Schmidt was presented with a commemorative plaque with the inscription: “Ryan Morgan Service Award. For exceptional and selfless work for the protection and enhancement of the Molalla River and its watershed.”

The service award is given in memory of Ryan Morgan, a founding member of the Alliance who was a youth counselor and mentor, Molalla High School track coach, Molalla City Council member and an avid outdoorsman. Morgan lost his life in a kayaking accident on the Little White Salmon River in August of 2009.

There’s a little more to the license plate story

A recent front-page story in *The Oregonian* (“Salmon fees land in Salem pockets,” Dec. 3, 2014) took the Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board to task for using revenue from salmon license plate fees for administrative overhead instead of removing culverts and obstacles that block salmon recovery.

A reader could get the impression that removal of culverts and obstacles isn’t being done by OWEB at all.

The truth is salmon license plate revenue amounts to less than 1 percent of OWEB’s entire budget, which has other revenue sources including lottery money.

In reporting that salmon license plate revenue has been used to pay for administrative and management services—the story ignored a much larger picture of OWEB’s comprehensive contributions to anadromous fish recovery over the last quarter-century.

In fact, OWEB is putting all of its revenue sources to productive use in support of salmon and steelhead recovery and enhancement efforts in streams and rivers all over Oregon.

Since 1998 OWEB has invested more than \$600 million in projects that support native fish and wildlife habitat. Of this, nearly \$142.5 million has been invested in “passage” projects, which include culvert removal and replacement with bridges, along with dam removals and similar projects that provide access for salmon.

On the Molalla River alone, OWEB grants in recent years have funded:

- A comprehensive recovery plan on the lower stretch of the river (\$42,500);
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- A major enhancement project on the north fork of the Molalla involving placement of logs and boulders along 3,500 feet of stream to create holding pools, new spawning beds and rearing habitat for returning salmon and steelhead (\$98,000);
- In-stream biological assessments of salmonids (\$38,000); and
- Replacement of four undersized culverts with a clear-span bridge over Cedar Creek to enhance fish passage (\$66,000).

These enhancement efforts were carried out by Molalla River Watch Watershed Council, an MRA affiliate.

The OWEB grants provided leverage to secure an additional 50% of match funds and in-kind contributions from private landowners and nongovernment sources for these projects.



BBQ CookOff and Cruise-in a hit



Dozens of classic and custom cars cruised into Molalla's Clark Park in July as part of the Wild River CookOff and Cruise-in, sponsored by the Molalla River Alliance.

Pitmaster teams from around the Northwest competed for prize money and bragging rights in the 10th annual event, which included entertainment by local musicians and a watermelon eating contest for the kids.



Molalla River Alliance
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