

Pacific Rivers and Wild Salmon Center Testimony in Support of the Frank Moore Wild Steelhead Sanctuary Act of 2015 (Senate Bill 1448)
Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests and Mining
October 8, 2015

Pacific Rivers and the Wild Salmon Center have worked for decades to promote the conservation and sustainable use of healthy watersheds and wild salmon ecosystems. On this occasion, we are proud to support and honor an American war veteran and legendary steward of the North Umpqua River – Frank Moore. Nothing could be more fitting than to recognize this great American’s accomplishments by protecting the Steamboat Creek watershed, which is arguably the most important tributary to the North Umpqua River, as proposed in the *Frank Moore Wild Steelhead Sanctuary (FMWSS)*.

The designation of approximately 100,000 acres of some of the best remaining wild steelhead spawning areas in the Pacific Northwest pairs a legendary river – treasured by Oregonians and frequented by thousands of foreign visitors yearly – with an inspirational patriot and river guardian, Frank Moore.

We join the outpouring of support by neighbors, outdoor enthusiasts, recreational businesses (including anglers, rafters, hoteliers, hikers and others) to forever protect this special place while at the same time honoring an American hero.



Frank and Jeanne Moore

We will not retell the achievements of Frank and Jeanne Moore here. That story is now told in the film, *“Mending the Line”* along with several magazine and newspaper features, numerous achievement awards and recognitions and a special Oregon Field Guide television show dedicated to this exemplary couple. Or just talk to any of their neighbors, across the political spectrum. Humble and self-effacing, Frank and Jeanne have lived a life dedicated to community and public service with a deep connection to one of the most special places in Oregon, the North Umpqua River. Together, they bind the people of the North Umpqua to the extraordinary beauty and richness of its natural bounty. As stewards of the North Umpqua, Frank and Jeanne embody the resilience and grace that the landscape itself mirrors -- but, like the steep, rugged terrain or the fighting steelhead making their way upstream, they are tough as nails.

Wild Steelhead Sanctuary

The legislation identifies and protects approximately 100,000 acres of high conservation value lands and waters in the Steamboat Creek watershed. The watershed consistently is identified as one of the most important ecological areas in the Pacific Northwest, providing over 50 river and stream miles of high quality habitat for summer and winter steelhead, Coho salmon, rainbow trout and other native species. The Steamboat Creek watershed is also unique in that it serves as one of the few remaining cold water refuges for summer steelhead, which migrate from the main North Umpqua River to the cooler waters of Steamboat and Canton creeks in the summer months and hold in specific pools until the fall rains arrive. The Big Bend Pool of Steamboat Creek is one of the few places in the world where people can easily view hundreds of summer steelhead that use the pool as a refuge from warmer stream temperatures. Canton Creek, the primary tributary of Steamboat Creek, also has several known pools that summer steelhead utilize as a refuge from warm stream temperatures.

The tributaries and streams feeding the North Umpqua consistently rank among the most important wild salmon spawning and rearing grounds in the state. Steamboat Creek is recognized as a “Tier 1 Key Watershed” under the Northwest Forest Plan, selected for high water quality for drinking water and aquatic life. Forests in the area are designated “Late Successional Reserves” under the Northwest Forest Plan, managed to protect and enhance conditions of late-successional and old-growth forest ecosystems and high quality aquatic habitat. Further, the area is recognized in Oregon’s statewide Conservation Strategy as a priority “Conservation Opportunity Area” and its rivers and tributaries are ranked in the highest category as “crucial aquatic habitat” by the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife in its COMPASS database. Finally, the public-private, science-driven partnership convened under the auspices of the North American Salmon Stronghold Partnership recognized the North Umpqua, including the proposed FMWSS as a “Wild Salmon Stronghold” in the Pacific Northwest.

Together, the transitional moist and dry forest zone in the Umpqua National Forest are home to a great diversity of plant and animal species. Its flora and fauna is unique, boasting moist and dry forest components with several endemic and rare species. Jeanne Moore has spent her life identifying the myriad of native plant species in the Steamboat Creek watershed and there is strong

local support to honor her as well as Frank in this designation. Habitat conditions continue to improve in the proposed Sanctuary, providing an array of vital ecosystem services to absorb, filter and release cold, clean water, nurture a thriving sport fishing economy downriver, and provide numerous recreational opportunities. The area also is highly valued for its Native American heritage sites and rugged recreational hiking and backcountry offerings.

The unique and irreplaceable nature of Steamboat Creek and the North Umpqua was recognized early on, popularized by American novelist and angler Zane Grey (1872-1939). In the late 1930's Zane lent his support to the Roseburg Rod and Gun Club by appearing before the Oregon State Game Commission in support of the Club's successful proposal to curtail over-harvesting of salmon and steelhead by closing Steamboat Creek to angling. As early as 1959, the importance of the extraordinary wild fish habitat was recognized by the U.S. Forest Service and the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife as mining and fishing restrictions were set in place on Steamboat Creek. Later, in 1976, mineral withdrawal was extended to portions of 15 tributaries to Steamboat Creek.

Today, the extraordinary fish habitat, late-successional and old growth forests, rich array of rare and unique botanical assemblages and boundless recreational opportunities draws outdoor enthusiasts from all over the world to experience what Zane Grey considered one of the finest rivers in the world. Yet, despite recognition of the proposed sanctuary's ecological and economic importance, the proposed sanctuary only enjoys administrative protections and lacks the stability and profile of a designated national treasure. Senator Wyden's proposed legislation would remedy this lack of stability by elevating the Sanctuary and providing guidance and hopefully resources to the U.S. Forest Service concerning the management priorities and directives of the area, in addition to enhancing opportunities for educational and interpretive opportunities and citizen stewardship.

Steamboat Creek Fishwatch



Each year, 400-800 wild summer steelhead hold in Big Bend Pool in Steamboat Creek, arriving in May and staying in the pool until the fall rains come, as late as mid-December. Wild summer steelhead runs on the North Umpqua River range from 2,000 to 4,000 fish. Those holding in Big Bend Pool alone can account for 12 to 25 per cent of the

total run and over 30 per cent of the run that returns to Steamboat Creek. Though this pool is in a remote location, it is quite accessible from FS Road 38, which receives high recreation traffic during the summer and fall. The fish are clearly visible to anyone who stops at the location. Steamboat Creek

is closed to all angling, yet there is a troubling history of dynamiting, snagging and other illegal take of fish at this pool, as well as many other pools along Steamboat Creek and Canton Creek.

Since 1999, The North Umpqua Foundation in cooperation with the USFS has provided a trailer and per diem for a caretaker at Big Bend Pool. Each year the caretaker spends approximately 80 per cent of all hours at the pool or along the creek observing the fish, providing public information to an average of 1,300 visitors, and reporting poaching suspects to the Oregon State Police. In addition to the deterrent and outreach service, the caretaker keeps daily detailed notes on the natural conditions, fish numbers, and behavior. The data adds to the knowledge of wild summer steelhead behavior and increases the public awareness of these important fish.

Creating the Frank Moore Wild Steelhead Sanctuary provides a singular opportunity to institutionalize this valued program. Indeed, there is a strong interest in expanding the Fishwatch program to include nearby steelhead holding and rearing areas on Canton Creek and elsewhere in the watershed. Creating the Sanctuary and acknowledging the value of this and similar programs will enhance opportunities to build support and financial resources for public-private partnerships, like that established by the North Umpqua Foundation.

Canton Creek

Canton Creek, while part of the same Steamboat Creek watershed, is outside the proposed Sanctuary. The approximately 40,000 acre sub-watershed contains 36 miles of high quality anadromous salmonid streams, with some 77% of the sub-watershed in public ownership, managed by BLM in the west and USFS to the east. Canton Creek is one of Steamboat Creek's most productive tributaries and, according to Frank Moore and other authorities, historically it produced as many fish as Steamboat Creek. The BLM is in the process of developing a restoration plan for Canton Creek and we are working closely with the agency. We have also been involved in discussions with owners of private forestlands in Canton Creek to explore opportunities for voluntary exchanges of select, high conservation value private parcels for equally valued BLM lands outside of the watershed.

The creation of the FMWSS may help accelerate those cooperative discussions, and the legislation should direct BLM to facilitate and expedite voluntary land exchanges of select parcels within Canton Creek with a view towards making management and conservation of the entire Steamboat watershed consistent and compatible with the goals of protecting aquatic resources and biodiversity.

We enthusiastically join the many local and state voices in strong support of the Frank Moore Wild Steelhead Sanctuary Act (S. 1448) and urge Congress and the President to join Sen. Wyden and Sen. Merkley to enact the designation expeditiously into law. Accordingly, the undersigned respectfully urge the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources to support Senate Bill 1448, the Frank Moore Wild Steelhead Sanctuary Act (S. 1448).



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