



## Protecting Drinking Water and Wild Salmon Runs on BLM Lands in Western Oregon

*A proposal for federal legislation to collaboratively manage clean water and healthy habitat on key Western Oregon watersheds*

An important discussion is underway on the future of 2.6 million acres of Oregon and California (“O&C”) Lands under BLM management in western Oregon. O&C Lands do more than just provide timber revenues to industry and counties; they play a vital role in providing drinking water and habitat for fish and wildlife. For example, over 1.8 million Oregonians get their drinking water from O&C Lands, with approximately 75% of O&C Lands falling within the Department of Environmental Quality’s “Drinking Water Protected Areas”. Oregon’s iconic rivers—the North Umpqua, Illinois, Rogue, McKenzie, Nestucca and others—flow through O&C lands and provide several thousand miles of habitat for fish and wildlife, supporting the healthiest wild salmon and steelhead runs south of Canada.

The Aquatic Conservation Strategy (ACS), a central component of the Northwest Forest Plan, is the most successful large scale public lands strategy to protect clean water and fish ever implemented. Currently, scientists agree watershed health in Western Oregon is improving in large part because of the ACS. We support a long-term solution to the management of O&C Lands that safeguards clean drinking water, wild salmon runs and the many recreational benefits these lands provide.

The ACS protects water quality and fish through the reserve system, riparian buffers, and limits on road proximity to streams and road density. These attributes are most exemplified in Key Watersheds. Reductions in riparian reserves to expand timber harvest will result in increased road densities and place new roads closer to streams. Impacts to water quality would be roughly proportional to the decrease in reserves, the increase of road density, and the degree to which roads are closer to streams. Due to the lack of aquatic protections on private forestlands any loss of water quality that federal lands provide is unacceptable.

Any O&C legislation or BLM Western Oregon Plan revisions should take an “all lands” approach to priority watersheds to ensure that protections on federal lands are part of a coordinated effort to maintain and enhance overall water quality as part of larger mixed ownership watersheds. Protections on federal lands should be complemented by direction to federal agencies to work with landowners across Key Watersheds as to meet water quality goals and conserve watershed health. Beyond the varied recreational benefits to anglers, hunters, hikers and others, effective watershed management saves tens of millions of dollars by mitigating the severity of floods and droughts, and supplying clean drinking water without the need for expensive secondary treatment plants to filter pollutants.

Recently, watershed conservation efforts on Portland’s Bull Run Watershed saved taxpayers over \$60 million in avoided secondary treatment costs. In Tualatin, ratepayers saved millions of dollars by planting trees instead of purchasing an expensive refrigeration system to cool river water. The City of Medford is addressing water temperature by working with landowners to conduct streamside restoration activities rather than constructing cooling towers or other engineered options. In Eugene, EWEB has devised an innovative payment for ecosystem services project to incentivize private landowners to protect their drinking water source areas on the McKenzie River and its tributaries.

Indeed, effective management practices help these healthy watersheds act as natural cooling and filtering systems for rivers and streams flowing through them.

### **1. RETAIN CORE WATERSHED PROTECTIONS ON FEDERAL LANDS IN WESTERN OREGON**

- ***Enact into law the current riparian reserves, buffers key watersheds and other aquatic protection standards***

The ACS includes innovative “riparian reserves”, providing adequate streamside buffers and limits on road densities to ensure that forested watersheds produce cold, clean water for our communities and for fish and wildlife. These standards have proven to be effective to restore healthy and resilient rivers and they should be enacted into law.

The ACS also designates several “key watersheds” for areas of outstanding ecological importance for water quality, and fish and wildlife habitat. “Key Watersheds” enshrine as a

primary management goal the restoration and maintenance of ecological processes and functions beneficial to water quality and quantity, and habitat creation and maintenance for native fish and wildlife. Key Watersheds are currently protected administratively as part of the Northwest Forest Plan and are often relied on by water providers and others as source areas for drinking water or anchor habitat or native fish and wildlife.

These critical natural assets should be expanded and protected by statute, ensuring that federal activities within these areas remain fully compatible with watershed health goals.

## **2. CONSERVE DRINKING WATER AREAS FOR 2 MILLION OREGONIANS**

- *Protect sensitive drinking water areas with high erosion potential*

Drinking water protected areas should be established to ensure clean drinking water for the 1.8 million Oregonians that rely on these lands for drinking water. These lands are identified by key parameters including those within where the O&C lands are within Oregon Department of Environmental Quality “drinking water protection areas,” close to the drinking water supply intakes or drinking water sensitive areas with high erosion or runoff potential (e.g. steep slopes, erodible soils), and areas that have historic or existing landslides.

## **3. RECOGNIZE AND FUND FEDERAL AND STATE WATERSHED CONSERVATION OPPORTUNITY ZONES**

- *Designate “Watershed Conservation Opportunity Zones” in Federal and State Law*

Most O&C Lands are interspersed with private timber lands in a checkerboard pattern traversing watersheds throughout western Oregon. Widely disparate state and federal river protection standards and land uses across these watersheds present a major challenge to achieving watershed goals for clean water and healthy habitats. For example, federal streamside buffers are eight times more protective than buffers required by state law. In addition, forest roads exacerbate water quality and produce chronic sediment in our rivers and streams. Road densities on O&C lands are too high, in part, because of the right of way issues with adjacent private lands. Funding for the restoration and remediation of problem roads needs to be a priority for O&C lands and the adjacent private lands. Adequate financial and policy measures can help incentivize private landowners to voluntarily improve their land stewardship, particularly for priority watersheds safeguarding our most ecologically and economically valuable natural assets.

Private lands within “*Watershed Conservation Opportunity Zones*” would be given the highest priority for collaborative (voluntary) conservation efforts, conservation incentive programs, voluntary land exchanges and road de-commissioning. Federal and state incentive-based programs managed by state and federal departments and agencies would be coordinated and targeted to increase resources and capacity in these priority watersheds.

We also support the creation of a land exchange and consolidation facility so long as proposed exchanges or consolidation proposals produce a **Net Conservation Benefit**.

*NO NEW OR ADDITIONAL REGULATIONS OR RESTRICTIONS ON PRIVATE LANDOWNERS ARE CREATED BY EITHER DESIGNATION.*

- ***Establish a Private Lands Conservation Fund***

An “all-lands” approach focused on watershed health and working landscapes can achieve watershed health and economic goals, as well as reducing the vast disparity between federal and private land protection standards. State and Federal funds will be directed towards conservation priorities in Watershed Conservation Opportunity Zones (and Key Watersheds), including addressing road-related issues (i.e. – de-commissioning, restoration, mitigation).

Incentive-based, voluntary programs in Watershed Conservation Opportunity Zones will create new avenues for private landowners to strengthen aquatic protection on their land while deriving more revenue for improving stewardship practices beneficial to salmon and other species. Together, they will help Oregon meet several goals relating to clean water, habitat, recreation and coastal management.

#### **4. DESIGNATE ADDITIONAL PROTECTIONS FOR AQUATIC HEALTH**

- ***Expand Wild and Scenic Rivers and Wilderness Areas***

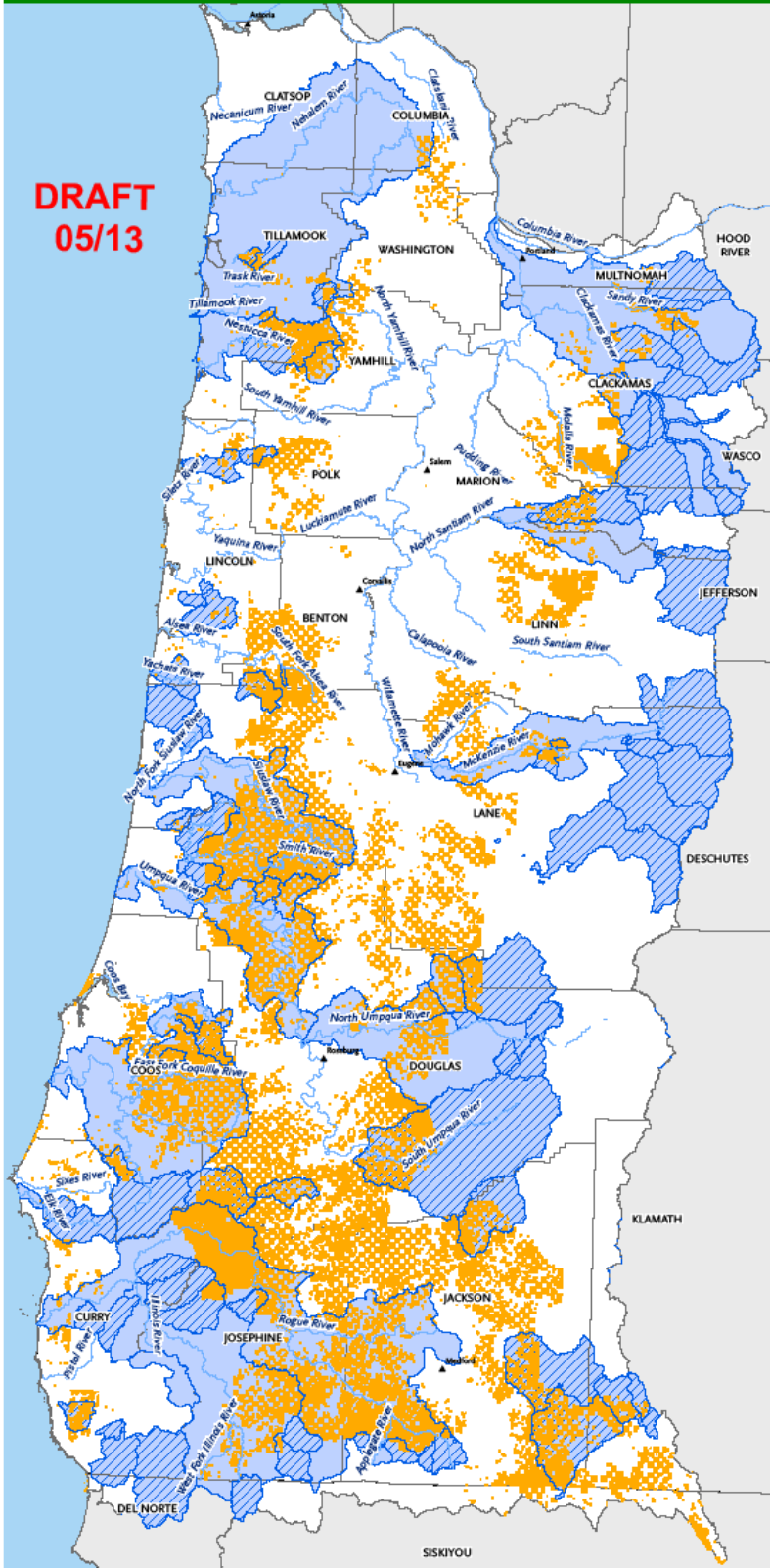
Some of the most important rivers for clean water, fishing and boating flowing through O&C lands are currently managed as eligible for Wild and Scenic Rivers by BLM and USFS. Segments of 87 streams in the Rogue, Umpqua, Nestucca, Chetco, Molalla, Alsea, and Coquille are eligible for protection under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act and should be considered for designation. (see Wild and Scenic appendix).

New wilderness areas under consideration in the Rogue, Umpqua and North Coast also provide important aquatic protection opportunities in western Oregon and should be considered as part of a strategy to protect our most important rivers and streams.



# Western Oregon Watershed Conservation Areas

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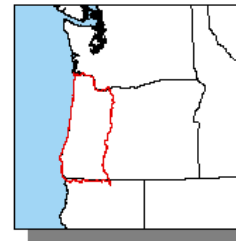


This map displays BLM land in Western Oregon alongside proposed Watershed Conservation Areas. The federal designation "Watershed Conservation Areas" would include two components: Key Watersheds and Conservation Opportunity Areas.

**Key Watersheds:** "Key Watersheds" enshrine as a primary management goal the restoration and maintenance of ecological processes and functions beneficial to water quality and quantity, and habitat creation and maintenance for native fish and wildlife. Key Watersheds are currently protected administratively as part of the Northwest Forest Plan.

**Conservation Opportunity Areas:** Private lands within these areas would be given the highest priority for collaborative (voluntary) conservation efforts, conservation incentive programs, voluntary land exchanges and road de-commissioning.

- Conservation Opportunity Areas
- NWFP Key Watershed
- BLM



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Data Sources: Bureau of Land Management; Wild Salmon Center

