

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20510

February 1, 2017

Lisa Northrop, Forest Supervisor
Mt. Hood National Forest
16400 Champion Way
Sandy, OR 97055

Dear Supervisor Northrop:

We write to urge the US Forest Service to complete the Government Camp Cooper Spur Land Exchange mandated by the Omnibus Public Lands Act of 2009 (PL 111-11, "2009 Act") consistent with the terms of the 2009 Act and the interests of the public and our environment.

The purpose of the 2009 Act was to help resolve decades of dispute over proposed development on the northeast side of Mt. Hood by protecting the mountain's north side and directing future development to the south side in a manner consistent with state and local land use laws. The land exchange required by the 2009 Act intended to ensure that the land in Government Camp be prioritized for development, and that as much of the undeveloped land on the north side in and around the Inn at Cooper Spur and the Cooper Spur Ski Area be protected under federal ownership. To that end, the 2009 Act also included the designation of new Wilderness for the Tilly Jane area, and protections for the Crystal Springs drinking watershed zone of contribution.

Completing the land exchange is particularly important to the communities in Government Camp and the Hood River Valley, as it will achieve significant preservation of habitat and watershed health on the northeast side of the mountain. The land exchange required by the 2009 Act garnered broad support of local businesses, conservation organizations, and citizen groups, as well as the Oregon Congressional delegation because it would protect significant acreage on the north side and comply with Oregon's land use goals of containing the development on the South side of Mt Hood.

The forthcoming appraisal will provide the values for the properties considered for exchange. In light of the public and conservation purposes of the exchange, we urge the Forest Service to keep all options on the table for the eventual equalization of the exchange properties, and to carefully consider and disclose the public interest value of all options for equalization. For example, we encourage the Forest Service to consider an alternative that provides for the retention of the Cooper Spur Ski Area property in its currently developed size and as reconfigured by the Act, as retention of this developed ski area would serve the public interest and continue to enhance the outdoor recreation activities for many families. If more land and buildings must be retained to equalize values, we urge the Forest Service to consider retention of the three acres upon which the

Inn is located. We encourage the Forest Service to fully explore this alternative prioritization in the final EIS, and to discuss and disclose how this option serves the purposes of the 2009 Act.

In addition, given the public interest at stake, we urge the Forest Service not to wait to release the appraisal until publication of the final EIS, but instead to make the appraisal public well beforehand. Our constituents have been intimately involved in the process, having actually done their own appraisal prior to the original bill. The cooperation, collaboration and good will of all parties involved have been an integral part of the land exchange process. The public must be able to scrutinize the appraisal and provide input prior to the release of the final decision.

Finally, while we support thinning projects for legitimate fire safety reasons, when planned and implemented appropriately, and in appropriate places, we are concerned about any plans to thin and build roads within the Crystal Springs drinking watershed that aren't planned to closely follow the goals and intent of the statute. As you are aware, the 2009 Act designated the Crystal Springs Watershed Special Resources Management Unit ("Crystal Springs Unit"), pursuant to an agreement originally proposed by Oregonians, and reached after many years of collaboration between the communities in Government Camp and the Hood River Valley. The purpose of the Crystal Springs Unit was to "ensure the protection of the quality and quantity of the Crystal Springs watershed as a clean drinking water source for the residents of Hood River County, Oregon" and specifies the conditions under which new road construction, renovation of existing non-System roads, and harvesting commercial timber can occur. We urge the Forest Service to ensure that in the proposed Environmental Impact Statement you faithfully track the legislation and not take any actions that could undermine the special protections and unique values of the Crystal Springs drinking watershed.

Thank you for your attention to these comments.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator

Earl Blumenauer
Member of Congress