

## **Lost in the wilderness**

Some of this state's most precious land is waiting for another Oregon wilderness advocate in Congress.

Sunday, December 11, 2005

The Oregonian

The legendary U.S. Sen. Mark Hatfield regularly chose his re-election year to push through wilderness legislation protecting Oregon forests, mountains and rangelands for perpetuity.

Hatfield understood the power and public appeal of wilderness. During his remarkable 30-year career in the Senate, he fought for legislation that not only created the Mount Jefferson Wilderness but also quadrupled Oregon's wilderness system, from 500,000 acres to 2.1 million acres.

Oregon needs another strong, statewide advocate for wilderness protections. Oregon is far behind neighboring states in protecting wilderness: California has protected 13 percent of its landscape, Washington 10 percent and Oregon just 3.6 percent. Some lawmakers are trying: Reps. Greg Walden and Earl Blumenauer are co-sponsoring a bipartisan proposal to add 75,000 acres to existing Mount Hood wilderness. Sen. Ron Wyden has proposed a more sweeping 177,000-acre expansion of Mount Hood wilderness.

The Mount Hood plans are encouraging, but Oregon has a number of other areas that deserve wilderness protection. The conventional wisdom is that only small, noncontroversial wilderness expansions have any chance in this Republican-controlled Congress. Oregon has a number of places that fit that definition, including:

Copper Salmon, a spectacular 11,500 acres in the northwest corner of the Siskiyou National forest, where old-growth forests line the North Fork of the Elk River, described by Forest Service biologists as perhaps the most productive salmon fishery in the lower 48.

Soda Mountain, an important biological crossroads with a remarkable concentration of plant and animal species, at the heart of the Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument.

The Badlands, 38,000 acres of public land east of Bend, divided by dry river canyons and marked by castle-like lava formations, ancient juniper trees and Indian pictographs.

All these proposed wilderness areas have broad popular support. All are worthy of the lasting protection of this special federal law.

And all of them are waiting for another Mark Hatfield, an Oregon leader eager to deliver the most enduring gift that any political leader can leave to this state.

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