

HERMAN E. BAERTSCHIGER, JR.
STATE SENATOR
DISTRICT 2



OREGON STATE SENATE
900 COURT ST NE
SALEM, OR 97301

Dear Honorable Members of Oregon's Congressional Delegation:

I am writing to express concerns regarding the potential expansion of Rogue River Wild & Scenic designations as proposed in the Oregon Wildlands Act. As you know this legislation is part of the broader public lands omnibus (S.1) pending in the 116th U.S. Congress.

As a wildlands fire manager with decades of experience working in the dry forests of Southern Oregon, I am concerned that expanding Wild & Scenic areas near the Rogue River will further restrict the ability of federal land managers to reduce fuels on these fire-prone lands. As a consequence, the changing and dangerous conditions on these lands will leave Grants Pass and other nearby communities vulnerable to catastrophic wildfires similar to those California experienced last year.

It is my understanding no maps have been made available of the proposed expansions, and little effort has been made to gauge the fire potential on lands proposed for these designations. Anecdotal evidence suggests many of the creeks and tributaries identified for these designations do not carry water for many months of the year. However, citizens in Southern Oregon have suffered from devastating fires that burned unchecked on designated wilderness lands. Fire modeling on these lands would indicate a very high potential for wind-driven catastrophic events in the future.

As you are likely aware, the U.S. Forest Service recently released a report identifying the communities at greatest risk of wildfire. The report indicated that more than 106,000 homes in Jackson and Josephine Counties are at risk, taking up 23 of the top 50 spots, with the community of Merlin near the Rogue River claiming the top spot.

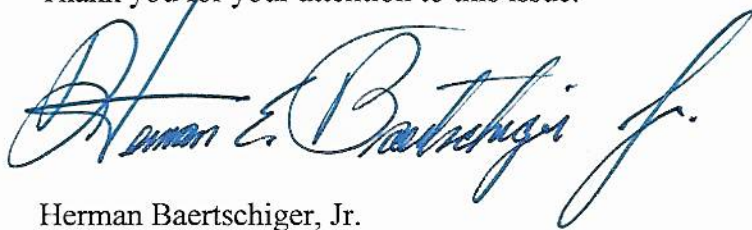
Last year residents of Merlin were threatened by the Taylor Creek Fire, which merged with other fires to form the massive 175,000 Klondike Fire. These lands were previously identified for fuel reduction treatments by the Bureau of Land Management. However, due to administrative protests, the area burned before the project could be implemented.

Federal agencies have demonstrated an inability to accelerate needed forest treatments, and past actions have demonstrated an unwillingness by some to attack fires before they can cause large-scale devastation. These should serve as a warning to state and federal policymakers who are interested in protecting our Southern Oregon communities.

Catastrophic wildfires in recent years have damaged our local economy, resulting in lost tourism activity and negative effects on recreation businesses dependent on the Rogue River. It is unclear what problems the proposed expansion of Rogue River Wild & Scenic is attempting to solve. But once again, fire models will indicate significant potential as fires are allowed to burn and spread unchecked on these designated lands.

I would strongly encourage you to withdraw the proposed Rogue Wild & Scenic expansion from both the Oregon Wildlands Act and the public lands omnibus, and work to develop comprehensive forest and fire management solutions that better meet the needs of our Southern Oregon communities.

Thank you for your attention to this issue.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Herman E. Baertschiger, Jr." The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'H' and 'B'.

Herman Baertschiger, Jr.
Oregon State Senate, District 2
Senate Republican Leader