

# The Oregonian

## Thing of beauty: a yes vote for new wilderness

**The House is set to pass a Mount Hood wilderness bill,**

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and now the heavy lifting falls to Oregon's senators

Three years ago, it was hard to imagine that anyone could carry the heavy load of a Mount Hood wilderness bill up the steep slope of a Republican-controlled Congress.

Yet now the bill is only a few big steps away from reaching the summit and becoming law.

A House committee led by a chairman deeply suspicious of any new wilderness has approved, by unanimous consent, a bill that would add 77,500 acres of wilderness at Mount Hood. The full House could take up and approve the Mount Hood wilderness bill as soon as this week.

When that happens, Oregon Reps. Greg Walden and Earl Blumenauer finally can hand over their backpacks to Sens. Ron Wyden and Gordon Smith. Then it will be the senators' turn to do the heavy lifting to get more Mount Hood wilderness into law.

Walden and Blumenauer deserve a rest -- and the enthusiastic applause of Oregonians -- for all they have done together on Mount Hood. Walden, the rural Republican, and Blumenauer, the urban Democrat, have gone the extra mile to bridge their political differences and bring home the first expansion of Mount Hood wilderness in 21 years.

The two political opposites have spent three years on this trek, holding public summits, meeting with hundreds of stakeholders and even walking the land on a four-day, 41-mile hike together around the base of Mount Hood.

Now they have brought to a final vote in the House a bill that would protect the beautiful Roaring River watershed and the ancient, 1,000-year-old cedar trees in Big Bottom. Their bill also will corral more federal money to pay for trails and expand other much-needed recreation facilities.

The legislation also will direct the government to make long-overdue improvements in the overwhelmed roads leading up to the mountain. Further, it will help resolve a long-running development dispute by enabling a proposed land swap giving Mount Hood Meadows Ski Area 120 acres of federal land in exchange for about 770 acres the ski area owns at Cooper Spur.

The House bill is a fine piece of legislation, but the Senate can make it even better. The House bill omits several areas on the east slope of the mountain that should be included

in any expansion of Mount Hood wilderness. In a recent meeting with The Oregonian's editorial board, Smith and Wyden said they were not yet prepared to discuss their own negotiations about the Mount Hood wilderness. We hope the senators can reach agreement on a deal that would push the expansion to more than 100,000 acres.

But they need to get moving. Like the summer hiking season on Mount Hood, the Senate calendar during an election year is short. Not all that many days are left to get a Mount Hood bill all the way through Congress and onto the president's desk.

It would be a shame to waste this week's House vote, and all of Walden and Blumenauer's hard work to get Mount Hood wilderness this far. Wyden and Smith need to shoulder those packs, put the wilderness bill on their backs and start climbing.

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