



## **In Our View: They Served Steak**

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Two Oregon congressmen show one way more laws ought to be made

It has been said that watching laws being written is as unappetizing as watching sausage being made. If most lawmaking is that gory, what's happening in Oregon is the equivalent of a political filet mignon. Teenagers thinking idealistically about a career in politics, plus voters throughout the Northwest, ought to take note.

Two Oregon congressmen from opposite parties and opposite sides of the Cascade Mountain Range are winning justifiable headlines and praise for their agreement on what a Mount Hood wilderness bill should include and not include.

Perhaps the three-year effort by Rep. Greg Walden, R-Hood River, and Rep. Earl Blumenauer, D-Portland, will set a new standard for bipartisanship involving a multitude of competing interests. It deserves a mention in political science lectures and textbooks, and has relevance in this state.

Seeking to end a dispute dating at least to the mid-1980s, the two lawmakers co-hosted countless meetings and hearings in various towns and with various groups on both sides of the Cascades.

Then, last summer, they backpacked together around Mount Hood 41 miles in four days. This was far more than some elaborate photo opportunity. On that trek and throughout their three-year effort, considerable political bonding has occurred. There was just no way they would allow this whole thing to end in a stalemate.

Tuesday, they unveiled a bill to designate 77,500 acres in a dozen different parcels in the Mount Hood National Forest as wilderness area. That designation brings strict limits on what activities are allowed (no roads; no motorized vehicles, for example) compared to the non-wilderness parts of our national forests. The proposal also would give another 19 miles of rivers in the area protection under the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

Environmental groups and Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., want considerably more land in the forest designated as wilderness. But 77,500 acres isn't chump change, and something is better than nothing, which is the total acreage in the Mount Hood National Forest that has been declared wilderness in the past 21 years.

The bill also would mandate a 10-year Forest Service plan to thin and otherwise care for forest areas in need of attention. The ramifications of the proposal would affect other interests, all of which were among those involved in meetings and

hearings. They include towns and communities, Indian tribes, transportation and skiing interests and others.

It's too bad the effort to establish a Wild Sky Wilderness in eastern Snohomish County, Wash., hasn't had the Walden-Blumenauer level of bipartisan commitment from this state's congressional delegation. That 106,000-acre proposal is bottled up in a House subcommittee.

Which brings us back to the sausage. Unfortunately, Rep. Richard Pombo, R-Calif., who doesn't much like the idea of new wilderness designations, is chairman of the House Resources Committee from which wilderness legislation must emerge. He, more than anyone, is the reason the Wild Sky bill has bogged down. But with bipartisan support and some level of buy-in from an array of interests, the Walden-Blumenauer filet mignon might whet Pombo's appetite.

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