

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the gentlewoman's courtesy in permitting me to speak on the bill. I, too, would like to thank Chairman Pombo, Ranking Member Rahall, Subcommittee Ranking Member Udall, and the staff of the committee that they worked with, and colleagues PETER DEFAZIO and DARLENE HOOLEY for helping bring this legislation to the floor today.

The Mount Hood Stewardship Legacy Act represents a tremendous amount of hard work by 1,000 Oregonians who found common ground on the critical issues facing our State's icon, Mount Hood.

Mr. Speaker, I want to especially thank my colleague and subcommittee chair, Mr. Walden, for working with me for more than 3 years on this legislation, and for his idea that we actually hike around the mountain. It was a fitting capstone to a really extraordinary opportunity to work together, to strengthen a friendship, and be able to focus on something that is so important to our State.

Together, we enlisted extensive involvement of citizen groups, environmental organizations, recreational advocates, public agencies, tribal representatives, and local governments to create a bill that establishes a long-term sustainable vision for the mountain and addresses the immediate challenges of wilderness protection, recreation, transportation, forest health, water quality, development, and Native American rights.

It seems so simple today, as we come forward, not just with the Mount Hood wilderness bill, but with a comprehensive vision for the future of Mount Hood. The plan makes sense. The pieces fit together in logical ways. But it seems so simple only because 1,000 people, public servants, academics, expert stakeholders, volunteers and people who just plain care about the mountain were willing to roll up their sleeves and invest 3 years to work with my partner, GREG WALDEN, and me, to make this happen.

I must also acknowledge three other critical people, who were invested in this, in this body and soul, Colby Marshall, on Congressman Walden's staff, Janine Benner and Hillary Barbour on mine. They were a team in Washington, D.C., they were a team in Oregon, and they were a key part, literally, in joining us around the mountain. We would not be here today without their efforts.

We began drafting with a document that contained core principles and concepts. The ideas were developed through the elaborate public process that my colleague, Congressman Walden, just outlined, and that great 41-mile hike around the mountain.

It was through these meetings with interested parties, thousands of public comments, that we further refined the principles and then translated them into the legislation, which was introduced this spring. Following the Forest Subcommittee hearing in April, we continued working with stakeholders, the Forest Service, our colleagues from both parties, staff people, to refine the language and clarify the intent.

Mr. Speaker, it has been a long hard effort, but it has been worth it, because the stakes for Mount Hood and the Pacific northwest have never been higher. It is not just an icon for both our home towns of Hood River and Portland, it is the single most important recreational resource in Oregon. A million people depend upon the integrity of the mountain for their drinking water. And it is a place of retreat for tens of thousands of people every year.

There are hundreds of people who call the mountain their home, and we have historic treaty and moral obligations to Native Americans for whom the mountain has special spiritual and practical significance.

By solemn treaty rights, they are owed their due for gathering first foods, hunting, fishing and for spiritual observances.

This bill deals with the important elements that will profoundly affect Oregonians for generations to come. First and foremost, over 77,000 acres of pristine wilderness will be protected, a 40 percent increase in wilderness inventory.

Over 25 miles of river will be protected as "wild and scenic." This bill will protect the pristine quality of these areas that people hold so dear.

It is not by any stretch of the imagination the last word on wilderness, but it does break down the log jam that has prevented wilderness from moving forward for over 20 years.

We have dealt with the very complicated and challenging issue of recreation. Our legislation will ensure that people who love to snowshoe, ski, mountain bike, snowmobile and hike will have access, but we are also making sure that we will all not collectively be loving the mountain to death.

We have laid the groundwork to address the mountain's transportation challenges in a way that will both ensure the safety of the mountain's visitors and residents, while at the same time moving more people but in fewer cars to and from key recreation destinations.

Even the 3,449 miles of forest roads that are currently in uneven states of repair and without adequate resource provide the basis for a potential unparalleled system of bicycle facilities. We will help the Forest Service work with local communities to address forest health and water shed issues. We will enhance the ability of Native Americans to gather first foods and exercise their treaty rights.

We address long simmering disputes about where development on the mountain should take place. For example, the Cooper Spur land exchange settles a 30-year dispute on the north side of the mountain, and is widely supported by conservation groups, citizens, and the ski industry and county government.

Its implementation keeps development on the south side of the mountain where infrastructure already exists, while protecting the pristine north side in perpetuity. With this legislation, we honor the historic mediated settlement between the parties and we now appear to be within reach of a long-term solution that is in everyone's best interest.

Today, Mr. Speaker, is one of the most important days in the modern history of Mount Hood. We have proven that the many people who care can put the pieces together in a finely-balanced fashion that produces a blueprint for the next century, while enhancing current uses and being true to the mountain legacy we all hold so dear.

Mount Hood--A Legacy for the Future

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This is the most progress we have seen in either the House or the Senate in over 20 years. I am hopeful that our friends in the other body will seize the day. If they choose to act this week, the President can sign this bill into law before Labor Day, assuring the single most important step in crafting and implementing the legacy of Mount Hood for the next century.