

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510

December 7, 2012

Jerome E. Perez, State Director
Oregon/Washington Bureau of Land Management
333 S.W. 1st Avenue
Portland, Oregon 97204

Dear State Director Perez:

We are writing in support of extending the existing mineral withdrawal for 4,239 acres, along approximately 14 miles of the Scenic segment of the National Wild and Scenic Illinois River for a period of 20 years (Public Land Oregon (PLO) No. 6986). The order expires on June 30, 2013 unless extended. Therefore, we urge the Bureau of Land Management to act promptly to process the USDA Forest Service's application to extend the PLO and to make a recommendation to the Secretary of Interior well ahead of the expiration date.

This 14 miles of Scenic River has been closed to mineral entry and the location of new mining claims since the Illinois was named a Study River in the 1968 Wild and Scenic Rivers Act. Invalid mining claims have virtually been eliminated. Few if any active claims remain. However, potentially harmful mining activity could begin immediately in this pristine area if the current withdrawal is not extended. This would cause irreparable harm to this beautiful river, result in unnecessary and possibly violent user conflicts, and undermine decades of investment and protection paid for by the taxpayer.

We have serious concerns that if the mineral withdrawal expires, local conflicts between miners and other day users – estimated to be as many as 2,000 people in a given hot summer afternoon - will likely increase and intensify. There has been ongoing violent rhetoric and scattered violent episodes over the past few years which could easily escalate into more dangerous situations. Extending the mineral withdrawal will help maintain public safety and is imperative in Josephine County where law enforcement resources are underfunded.

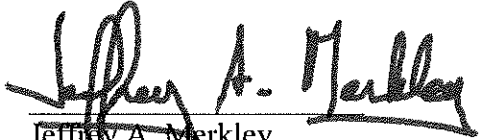
The National Wild and Scenic Illinois River is one of our nation's most outstanding whitewater treasures. Mining upstream would have serious ecological consequences for the Wild River segment immediately downstream.


In addition to the outstandingly remarkable water quality, recreation, scenic and botanical values of the National Wild and Scenic Illinois River, it's one of the few strictly wild anadromous fisheries in the Northwest. According to the National Marine Fisheries Service, there have been no hatchery supplementation programs in the Illinois River Basin. In other words, the river's wild salmon and steelhead are about as genetically pure as it gets.


The values, which the Secretary of Interior sought to protect in 1993 by withdrawing 14 miles of the Scenic River Area of the Illinois from mineral entry and the location of new claims, have only grown more rare, cherished and in-demand. The withdrawal was in the best interest of the people of Oregon and the nation then, and is even more so now.

Thank you in advance for your prompt attention to this matter and for considering our request.

Sincerely,


Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator


Ron Wyden
United States Senator


Peter Defazio
United States Representative
