



Hood River Valley Residents Committee
PO Box 100
Mt. Hood, OR 97041

Mr. Ralph Bloemers
Staff Attorney, Crag Law Center
On Behalf of **Hood River Valley Residents' Committee**

Testimony before the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands of the
House Natural Resources Committee
Hearing on HR 6290 - Lewis and Clark Mount Hood Wilderness Act of 2008
September 11, 2008

My name is Ralph Bloemers, and I am here today on behalf of the Hood River Valley Residents' Committee (HRVRC). HRVRC represents approximately 160 families in the Hood River Valley that stretches from the majestic Mt. Hood to the mighty Columbia River. Many of the families represented by HRVRC are second and third generation family farmers working some of the 15,000 acres of pear orchards in the Hood River Valley, representing more than half of Oregon's world-famous pear industry. In 2000, a study prepared for Oregon State University estimated that the fruit industry in Hood River County contributed \$80.5 million per year to the State of Oregon along with almost 5,400 jobs throughout the Pacific Northwest (Radtke 2000). In recent years, the cherry plantings in the valley have also grown significantly, and the fruit industry can help sustain the economy of Hood River County for many years to come. Many of HRVRC's members are also woodland owners, managing private forest lands that comprise 50 percent of the private land base in the county.

The family farmers in Hood River County are facing continuing threats to their businesses and way of life. Three of the most pressing problems include: 1) loss of agricultural land and open space, 2) threats to drinking water sources, and 3) threats to water quantity. HRVRC's members are also seeing threats to the long tradition of backcountry recreation and enjoyment of wildlands that has inspired their families and their work for generations. HR 6290 offers the promise of a visionary solution to these problems—Wilderness and Wild & Scenic River Protection supports the the thriving agricultural and recreational economies of Oregon.

We would like to thank Chairman Rahall of the House Natural Resources Committee, Subcommittee Chair Grijalva, Representative DeFazio and Representative Blumenauer for taking a personal interest in Mt. Hood and in the communities that depend on the mountain for their livelihood. We would also like to thank the other members of the Oregon Congressional delegation, including Representatives Walden, Hooley and Wu for their work and support. They have worked across the aisle to listen

to the community, to learn the mountain and to consider a wide range of potential solutions to the problems we are facing in Oregon. HRVRC fully supports the provisions in HR 6290 that accomplish the proposed solution for the North side of Mt. Hood and appreciates all the hard work that Oregon's Congressional Delegation has put towards finding a pro-active solution.

As you may know, HRVRC has worked for over seven years with recreation clubs like the Oregon Nordic Club and the Mazamas, historic preservation groups like the Friends of Tilly Jane, local community groups like the Friends of Mt. Hood, and mountain explorer clubs like the Ptarmigans and the Crag Rats. We have also worked collaboratively with local residents within and adjacent to the Crystal Springs Watershed zone of contribution, including the Mountain Shadows Homeowners Association, the Snowshoe Club and many others. We have worked with officials from the Forest Service and with volunteers from local, regional and national conservation organizations like Portland Audubon, BARK, Northwest Environmental Defense Center, Oregon Wild and the Oregon Chapter of the Sierra Club. Working collaboratively, the HRVRC put forward a shared vision for the North side of Mt. Hood and for the mountain as a whole.

With that vision in mind, the HRVRC has worked with Mt. Hood Meadows and Hood River County to develop and advance a solution for Mt. Hood that would permanently protect and enhance the tradition of agriculture and backcountry recreation that has been passed down from generation to generation. Since 2004, the HRVRC has worked with officials from Hood River County, the Forest Service, Mt. Hood Meadows and the Crystal Springs Water District to hammer out a solution for Cooper Spur. The results of these historic efforts are presented in HR 6290 provisions on the land trade, the protection for the Crystal Springs, and wilderness for the Cooper Spur area. HRVRC and its allies have taken that solution out to the community and received almost unanimous positive feedback for it. This solution provides certainty and permanent protection for these special places—Oregonians want the North side to stay wild and free.

One of the most important provisions of HR 6290 is the protection of the Crystal Springs Watershed. One-third of the people in Oregon get their drinking water from the slopes of Mt. Hood. More than 1 million people drink from the rivers and watersheds of a single mountain. Protecting that water is the single most important issue for HRVRC and family farmers of the Hood River Valley. Years of collaborative problem solving in our community have resulted in the watershed protection measures included in HR 6290. The proposal will permanently protect this watershed which serves more than 25% of the people in Hood River County.

In addition, the value of the goods and services provided by the forests that would be protected under the proposed Cooper Spur settlement is incredibly significant. The HRVRC and its allies retained expert economist Dr. Ernest Niemi from ECONorthwest to provide us with an estimation of the present value of protecting these resources. The report found that the present value of the water-purification provided by these forests was \$1.5– \$3 million, the recreational opportunities were worth \$4.8 million and the carbon sequestration was worth \$5.1– \$9.0 million. In other words, protecting just the 4,000 acres on the North side of Mt. Hood has a net present value of at least \$11.4 – \$16.8.

In the report, Dr. Niemi noted that the area also provides important wildlife habitat for economically valuable species, including significant populations of deer and elk, which have value beyond what appears in the estimates for recreational hunting. The area also provides habitat for northern spotted owls, a species listed under the federal Endangered Species Act as threatened with extinction. The American public places great value on protecting this species and its habitat. In one study, the value of protecting old-growth and spotted owl habitat was estimated at \$632,000 – \$1,359,000 per acre. There are at least two known spotted owl habitat cores in the area, covering many hundreds of acres, which would be protected by this proposal. The spotted owl habitat alone may have a value of several million dollars.

Congressmen DeFazio and Blumenauer have listened to the community's input and the consensus that developed regarding the best way to manage the watershed for this and future generations, and the key concepts from the proposed solution are contained in HR 6290. HRVRC strongly urges the committee to retain and enhance the protections for the Cooper Spur area, the Crystal Springs watershed and the North side of Mt. Hood that are included in HR 6290. Moving these proposed protections through will strengthen the public's faith in a collaborative process that has taken years to complete and ends over three decades of conflict.

HRVRC is also thankful that HR 6290 has included key forested areas and stretches of rivers that are eligible for protection as Wilderness and Wild & Scenic Rivers. These lands and waters serve as critical sources of drinking water and recreation areas for the people of Hood River County. Places like Bonney Butte, Big Bottom, Memaloose Lake, the wildlands around Roaring River and other wild areas included in the bill are the kinds of special places that our children and our grandchildren will enjoy as Wilderness. The South Fork of the Clackamas River, the East and Middle Forks of the Hood River, the Roaring River, the White River and other remarkable stretches of river will be protected in this bill so that they can be enjoyed for years to come. These places provide us with drinking water, wildlife habitat, solitude and adventure. The preservation of wildlands and open spaces also helps to sustain the traditional way of life of the family farmers and residents that live, work and raise families around Mt. Hood.

Congressmen DeFazio and Blumenauer have shown leadership and compassion for the people of Oregon. HRVRC looks forward to working with this committee, the entire Oregon delegation and Senators Wyden and Smith to ensure that we leave a legacy for our children, so they have the same opportunity to live, work and play in and around Mt. Hood. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with the committee this morning.

Contact Information:

Ralph Bloemers, Counsel to HRVRC
Crag Law Center
917 SW Oak St., Suite 417
Portland, OR 97205
Tel. (503) 525-2727

Mike McCarthy
Pear farmer & HRVRC Member
8085 Clear Creek Road
Parkdale, Oregon 97045
Tel. (541) 352-6476