

**Statement of John Sterling, Executive Director of the Outdoor Industry Conservation Alliance
Pertaining to the Oregon Treasures Act of 2008 (HR 6291)**

Presented to the Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands of the House Natural Resources Committee, September 11, 2008

Chairman Grijalva and Congressman DeFazio, thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of HR 6291, the Oregon Treasures Act of 2008. My name is John Sterling, and I am Executive Director of the Outdoor Industry Conservation Alliance, based in Bend, Oregon. We are a group of roughly 160 outdoor businesses nationwide that sell products for active use in the outdoors. Our member companies – many of which are based in Oregon – work together to protect wilderness and rivers for their habitat and recreational values. My statement on behalf of The Conservation Alliance is limited to the provisions in the bill pertaining the Rogue Wild and Scenic River designations. My comments on the Oregon Caves boundary expansion represent my personal views as a native Oregonian.

Rogue Wild and Scenic River:

The Rogue River is among Oregon's most beloved rivers, and is one of the premier fishing and boating streams in the county. Congress recognized this fact in 1968 when it included 84.5 miles of the Rogue River from its confluence with the Applegate River downstream to Lobster Creek Bridge as one of the first eight units of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System. In 1988, Congress designated 40.3 miles of the river from Crater Lake National Park to Prospect as the Upper Rogue Wild and Scenic River.

HR 6291 would add 143 miles of tributary streams to the Rogue Wild & Scenic River. Each one of these tributary streams is individually worthy of Wild and Scenic River designation. They are free-flowing and have outstandingly remarkable values that include prime salmon and steelhead habitat, magnificent old-growth forest, endemic plant and animal species and tremendous recreational opportunities.

In addition, inclusion of the tributary streams will ensure protection of the outstandingly remarkable values for which the National Wild & Scenic Rogue River was designated in 1968. The outstandingly remarkable values for the mainstem Rogue have been identified by agency managers as scenic, fish and recreation. A management corridor along the mainstem averages only one-quarter mile on each side of the river. Rogue River salmon and steelhead spawn in tributary streams outside the narrow management corridor. The thousands of visitors that annually float the river or walk the Rogue River National Recreational Trail can often see the Rogue River Canyon beyond one-quarter mile of the river.

The Bureau of Land Management is opening the Rogue River Canyon to roading and logging to liquidate old-growth forest stands. This logging could be visible from the river or trail and will degrade water quality for fish and other aquatic species. BLM has already sold one old growth timber sale in the Rogue River Canyon and has more in the works.

The Conservation Alliance supports the effort to secure tributary protections for the National Wild and Scenic Rogue River because it is good for business. In Oregon, 76 percent of the population – more than

2 million Oregonians – participate in some form of nonmotorized outdoor recreation each year. Consumer spending on outdoor recreation merchandise contributes roughly \$125 million to Oregon’s economy annually.

The Rogue River is a major economic engine for northern Josephine County. Whitewater boating activity on the Wild Rogue accounts for \$9.8 million in direct spending, supports 225- full and part-time jobs, and generates \$14 million in total economic output, which includes \$7.5 million in personal income. These figures do not include in-river sport fishing or ocean sport and commercial fishing.

Outdoor customers in Oregon look to federal lands for recreation opportunities, and securing Wilderness and Wild and Scenic River protection for special places such as the Rogue River Canyon will ensure long-term recreational destinations for outdoor industry customers.

Our protected wilderness and rivers are among our most valuable economic assets. Increasingly, economic growth in Oregon is based on providing services to the rising number of residents who flock to our communities to live, work, or retire in places surrounded by protected natural areas. Our protected lands also draw businesses attracted to Oregon’s high quality of life. A recent study by the Sonoran Institute concludes that: “Wilderness, National Parks, National Monuments, and other protected public lands, set aside for their wild characteristics, can and do play an important role in stimulating economic growth – and the more protected, the better.”

By fully protecting the tributary streams in the Rogue River Canyon, this legislation responds to the demand from an overwhelming majority of Oregonians to ensure that future generations can enjoy Oregon’s natural heritage the same way we have. It also represents an investment in Oregon’s economic future.

Oregon Caves:

I remember first visiting Oregon Caves as a small child in the early 1970s. Like most people who visit Oregon Caves, I completed the 90-minute cave tour and marveled at the spectacular formations, which at the time – and keeping with the spirit of the decade – were enhanced with colored lights intended to make the natural features more impressive. Those lights have, thankfully, gone the way of the seventies.

S. 3148 would provide tremendous ecological and economic benefit by expanding the Oregon Caves National Monument, designating Cave Creek and its tributaries as a unit of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System and also permanently retiring the Big Grayback and Billy Mountain grazing allotments.

An expanded Oregon Caves National Monument (OCNM) would (1) include the surface drinking water supply for the 80,000 visitors annually; (2) protect additional surface and subsurface natural resources for current and future generations of Americans; and (3) provide local rural economic development opportunities.

The OCNM is a 480-acre national monument located in the botanically rich Siskiyou Mountains. The

monument is important to the economy and identity of the local area; the nearest town is named Cave Junction after the Oregon Caves. Despite being the second smallest unit (in area) of the National Park System, OCNM receives about 80,000 visitors annually. Oregon Caves is the only cave system in the nation with its particular geologic history. It is one of the few marble caves in the nation available for public tours and is the longest tour cave west of the Continental Divide. The cave tour route, with its twists, turns, climbs, descents, narrowness and length is one of the most adventurous cave tour routes in North America.

A perennial stream, the “River Styx,” (an underground portion of Cave Creek) flows through part of the cave system. The cave ecosystem provides habitat for numerous plants and animals, including some state sensitive species such as Townsend’s big-eared bats and several cave-adapted species of arthropods found only on the National Monument. While the 1909 proclamation that established the National Monument focused on unique subsurface resources, the significance of the land surface above the cave must not be overlooked. Surface processes, especially through the exchange of air, water and food, closely influence many of the geological and biological processes within the cave. Furthermore, the terrestrial component of the Monument preserves an excellent example of the Siskiyou Mountain’s primeval forest: an area with one of the highest percentages of endemic plants in the country.

Recent discoveries indicate that this network of caverns possesses a significant collection of Pleistocene aged fossils, including jaguar and grizzly bear. Grizzly bones that were found in the cave in 1995 were estimated to be at least 50,000 years old—the oldest known from either North or South America.

The Need to Adjust the Boundaries

When the OCNM was established in 1909, the small rectangular boundary was thought to be adequate to protect the cave. Through the years, scientific research and technology have provided new information about cave ecology, how it is influenced by its surface environment and related hydrological processes. The current 480-acre boundary is insufficient to adequately protect this cave system and its unique contributions to local economies and our national heritage. The National Park Service proposed expansion numerous times, first in 1939, again in 1949 and most recently in 1999. Most of the boundary adjustments proposed in S. 3148 are part of the 1999 General Management Plan for the monument when the National Park Service deemed the greater Lake Creek watershed suitable for inclusion in the OCNM.

Increasing Visitation and Advancing Community Development

A larger monument would increase the monument’s visibility and attractions. This could lengthen visit time of the OCNM leading to economic development in local communities. The average visit to OCNM is only 2.5 hours, and the most common question is, “What can we do after the cave tour?” Economic models indicate that if the 2.5-hour average visit were extended to a one-day visit, local businesses would significantly benefit from added tourist dollars. (Personal communication with Craig Ackermann, Superintendent, OCNM, February 20, 2007.) The OCNM is surrounded by excellent outdoor opportunities including hiking, horseback riding, and bird-watching. Adjacent recreation opportunities should be protected within the OCNM boundaries, and marketed along with cave tours. In addition, nearby Forest Service campgrounds would be incorporated into the monument.

The four trails within the current OCNM range from 0.7-3.3 miles. A number of longer trails around the monument offer visitors stunning views of northern California and southern Oregon. Most of the trails weave in and out of the present OCNM boundary, and some connect with larger hiking trail systems including the Boundary and Pacific Crest Trails, giving hikers access to the Red Buttes Wilderness, Bigelow Lakes, Mt. Elijah, and other popular areas.

Located in the Siskiyou Mountains of southern Josephine County, OCNM offers great potential for one of the state's most struggling economic communities by nurturing a budding tourism and recreation economy. According to a 1994 Illinois Valley Tourism Assessment developed for the Oregon Economic Development Department, Oregon Caves is a "centerpiece attraction" for the tourism industry in the Illinois Valley area.

Highway 199, stretching the length of the Illinois Valley, is a popular travel route between Redwood National Park and Crater Lake National Park, as well as a corridor for visitors that travel from the cultural center of Ashland to the Pacific Coast, as well as the OCNM. Surveys conducted in southwest Oregon and northern California describe visitors to this region to be primarily families taking a short vacation from the metropolitan areas of Portland, Seattle, Sacramento, San Francisco, and southern California (Smokejumper Base Interpretive Plan, undated).

Highway 199 has an annual traffic load of about one million vehicles. In 1992, the state estimated that 289,000 vehicles, about one third of the vehicles traveling Highway 199, represented tourist traffic. Surveys conducted at OCNM indicate that average daily spending per tourist group is \$90. These numbers indicate that more than \$26 million in tourism dollars pass through the Highway 199 corridor annually (Letter to Oregon Tourism Commission from OCNM Chief of Interpretation Roger Brandt, 18 April 2004). Compared to neighboring northern California counties, where tourism dollars per tourist group range from \$95-\$154 (Sheffield, Emilyn, 1998. Northern California Scenic Byway Network Newsletter, Chico, California), Josephine County clearly has room for economic development in this sector.

A 1995 survey of visitors at the OCNM found that the top reasons for travel were viewing scenery, doing something with the family, and to learn more about nature. (Rolloff, David, Rebecca Johnson, and Bo Shelby, 1995). Similar studies have found that people come to Oregon to indulge in their interest in outdoor recreation, nature experiences and historic sites (Brandt, 2004).

Grazing and Equitable Compensation

The bill provides for the donation of a Forest Service grazing permit and a Bureau of Land Management grazing lease. The Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest's Big Grayback Grazing Allotment (17,703 acres) overlaps about half of the 4,070-acre OCNM expansion area. National Park Service regulations would prohibit continued livestock grazing in the expanded National Monument. Currently livestock that use the Big Grayback Grazing Allotment tend to concentrate in the Bigelow Lakes area, a designated Botanical Special Interest Area.

Continuing to graze livestock on the remainder of the Big Grayback Grazing Allotment is problematic for several reasons and in conflict with existing designations. First, as noted, livestock concentrate in the Bigelow Lakes area. Second, there are two other designated botanical areas (Miller Lake, 588 acres; Grayback Mountain, 591 acres) and the Oliver Matthews Research Natural Area, where livestock grazing occurs, contrary to the purpose of the protective designation. In addition, there are 3,553 acres of Riparian Reserves, where livestock need to be limited. Parts of the allotment are also in the Sucker Creek Key Watershed for salmonid recovery. Finally, much of the allotment is in the Kangaroo Inventoried Roadless Area.

Additionally, surface water sources used for the OCNM potable water supply are located on National Forest land. Water is piped to park facilities where it is treated. Actions on the National Forest—upslope from the Monument—have the potential to impact the Monument and its drinking water supply. Activities such as mining, logging, grazing and stock use, have the potential to contaminate the OCNM water resources (OCNM General Management Plan, 1999, 8).

The 4,758-acre Bureau of Land Management Billy Mountain Grazing Lease is on the on the Ashland Resource Area of the Medford District BLM, approximately 3/4 of a mile south of the town of Applegate in Jackson County, Oregon. The same rancher that leases the Forest Service's Big Grayback Grazing Allotment leases the grazing allotment. The allotment is next door to the rancher's base property. He uses the BLM allotment in the spring and the Forest Service allotment in the summer.

The Billy Mountain Grazing Allotment includes the Enchanted Forest, a grove of oak, pine and maple, and a popular hiking trail. The allotment is interspersed with private land and there have been several complaints over the years by landowners dismayed by livestock on their property. Billy Mountain also includes habitat for the federally protected Gentner's fritillary (*Fritillaria gentnerii*), a member of the Lily family. This rare plant is found in the Applegate Valley in and near the grazing allotment. Its growing season includes the period when livestock may be using the allotment.

Expansion of the National Monument makes continued grazing of the Big Grayback Grazing Allotment very problematic, which therefore makes continued grazing of the Billy Mountain Grazing Allotment also problematic.

Conservation interests (specifically the Klamath-Siskiyou Wildlands Center) and rancher Phil Krouse have an understanding in which Mr. Krouse will receive compensation from KS Wild in return his donation of his federal grazing permit and lease to the federal government, as provided in the legislation.

Thank you for considering my comments. I look forward to working with you to ensure that HR 6291 is enacted this year.