



#7 CHETCO RIVER

OREGON



PHOTO: GEORGE SEXTON

THREAT: MINING

Summary

Southern Oregon's Wild and Scenic Chetco River boasts pristine waters and the prized opportunity to fish for large wild salmon and steelhead trout. However, this natural gem is threatened by proposals to mine half its designated length. Oregon's Senators Wyden and Merkley, Congressman DeFazio, and Governor Kulongoski have asked the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Interior, the agencies responsible for management of the river and for minerals, to prevent suction dredge mining on the river by administratively withdrawing it from mineral entry under the anti-

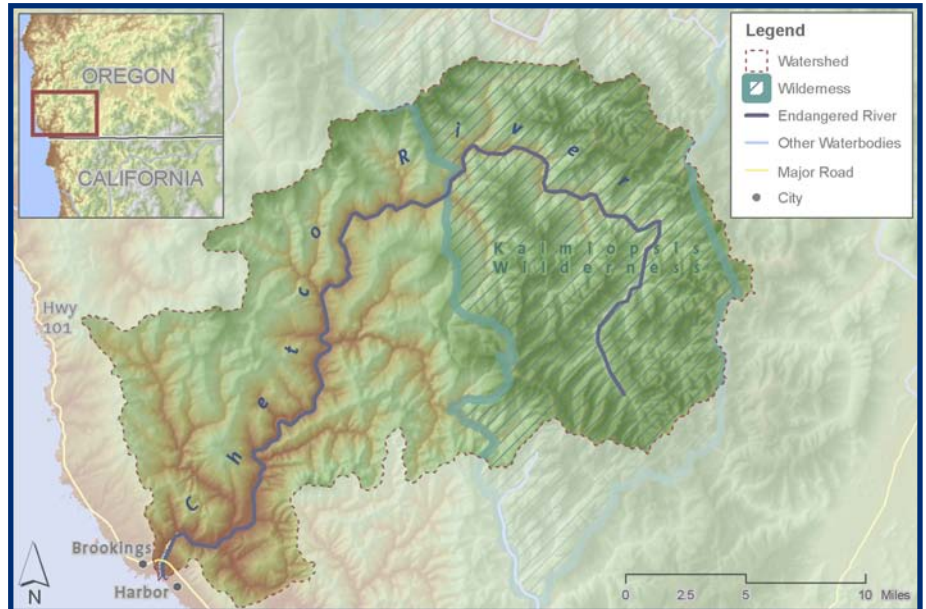
quated Mining Law of 1872. The motorized instream mining on this national treasure can begin as soon as July 15, 2010, so immediate administrative action is needed. This reprieve for the river will allow Congress time to legislate the best possible long-term protection for the Wild and Scenic Chetco River. Congress needs to provide similar protection for other national Wild and Scenic Rivers from the harmful effects of mining.

The River

The National Wild and Scenic Chetco River provides exceptionally pure and clean drinking water for the 14,000 residents of Brookings-Harbor, Oregon. In the winter, the river's salmon and steelhead fishery is a major economic engine for the coastal community, with anglers coming from afar to fish. In the summer, the river provides diverse recreation opportunities, including swimming in stunning green pools, camping, picnicking, boating, and sightseeing. The river supports nearly 200 wildlife species, including threatened stocks of coho salmon. Because most of the Chetco's watershed is publically owned, and almost half is protected wilderness, the river offers crucially important habitat for the conservation of Pacific salmon, steelhead trout, and other wildlife.

The Threat

In 2008, a proposal was submitted to mine roughly 24 miles of the 44.5-mile National Wild and Scenic segment of the Chetco River, including approximately six miles within the Kalmiopsis Wilderness. The current proposals call for mining as much as 3,200 cubic yards



of riverbed each year for gold using suction dredges weighing up to a ton. That is enough disturbed material to fill an Olympic-sized swimming pool every year.

The gravel and rock floor of the river's streambed is a complex ecosystem essential to the health of a river and its aquatic inhabitants, as it provides important spawning and nursery habitat for salmon and other fish spe-

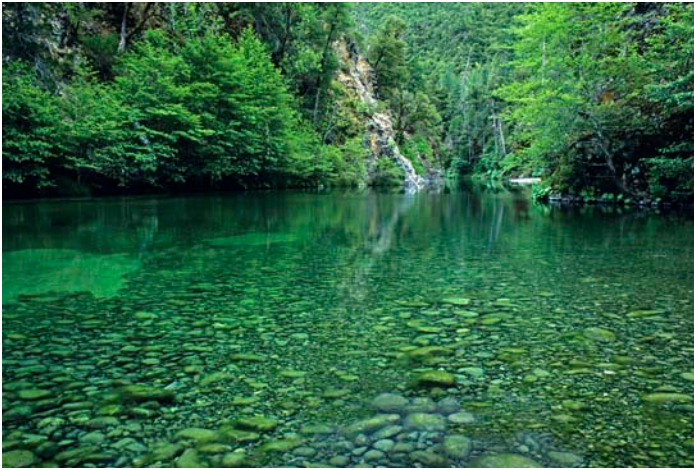


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cies. The structural stability of the streambed and just the right flow of water are critical factors in the successful reproduction of prized wild salmon and steelhead.

This life-giving habitat would be harmed by gasoline-powered suction dredges that operate like large-scale underwater vacuums sucking up streambed material and depositing it behind the dredge in chaotic trailing piles. Large rocks, root wads, and other stream structures are moved, and the stability and structure of the streambed is destroyed or compromised until natural flows restore its integrity. These suction dredges stir up silt, diminish water quality, and impact non-motorized recreational use of the rivers.

PHOTO: USDA FOREST SERVICE



What Must Be Done

Oregon's Senators Wyden and Merkley and Congressman DeFazio have twice requested that the Department of Agriculture and Department of the Interior withdraw approximately 19 miles of the Wild and Scenic Chetco River from mineral entry under the 1872 Mining Law. We need the Obama Administration to act immediately to protect this special river and to give Congress time to pass legislation that would provide the best possible lasting protection for the Chetco River. Additionally, Congress needs to provide similar protection from gold mining for all rivers of national importance.

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