

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE- 5/16/2013

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Coalition Files Suit to Protect Fragile Alpine Meadows on Mt. Hood

Destructive Mountain Biking Expansion at Timberline Lodge Threatens Summer Recreation Opportunities, Fish and Wildlife in Sandy River's Headwaters

May 16, 2013 -- Today Crag Law Center filed a lawsuit on behalf of Friends of Mt. Hood, the Oregon Chapter of the Sierra Club, the Northwest Environmental Defense Center, and Bark challenging the U.S. Forest Service's (USFS) decision to allow high-impact lift-assisted mountain biking that would harm fragile alpine habitat near Timberline Lodge on Mt. Hood. Over one million people visit Mt. Hood annually to climb, hike, ski, fish, bike, and play. Providing recreational opportunities and safeguarding our public land are at the core of the Forest Service's mission, and the agency has an obligation to reject environmentally destructive development proposals.

"Mountain biking is growing in popularity and we support Forest Service efforts to provide environmentally-responsible, quality recreational opportunities for mountain bikers and other recreationists. However, the fragile alpine soils at Timberline are the wrong place for a downhill lift-assisted mountain bike park," said Lori Ann Burd with Bark. "The Forest Service has failed to meet its responsibility to the public. Bark has worked with mountain bikers to encourage the Forest Service to convert unused logging roads into trails, but the Forest Service has failed to take action to seize these opportunities. Instead it has approved the construction of 17 miles of new trails in the sensitive headwaters of Still Creek and the West Fork of the Salmon River, leaving us no choice but to go to court to stop this development."

The area around Timberline Lodge is cherished for summertime recreation such as wildflower viewing in the shadow of Mt. Hood. "Timberline Lodge in the summertime has always been a place to seek peace and quiet, and generations of families have treasured memories of hiking, picnicking, and sightseeing around Timberline," said Dennis Chaney of Friends of Mt. Hood. "This project would jeopardize this beloved place by allowing high-speed downhill biking, races, and more development that will further degrade this fragile alpine environment. A National Historic Landmark and the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail are not compatible with an adventure park."

Marla Nelson of the Northwest Environmental Defense Center (NEDC) noted: "NEDC opposes this project because it would harm trout, salmon, and the aquatic environment that supports them." She stated that the project will also:

- Increase sediment in Still Creek and the West Fork of the Salmon River, undercutting the significant investment of time and money in restoring downstream trout and salmon habitat
- Convert vegetation into bare mineral soils and encourage the further spread of noxious weeds
- Disturb wildlife, including elk, which rely on these high alpine meadows during calving season

“Timberline’s master plan to build a new day lodge, a new parking lot, and this mountain bike park was accepted by the Forest Service without adequate consideration of the cumulative effects on this fragile alpine environment,” said Rhett Lawrence, Conservation Director with the Sierra Club. “Timberline has not been able to successfully restore the areas it has already damaged and any new construction would simply add to the area's degradation. The Forest Service needs to engage the public in a meaningful discussion of how to provide for ecologically responsible recreation on our public land, instead of taking more risks with Mt. Hood.”

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