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**COMMUNITY MEMBERS PRAISE REP. HUFFMAN/SEN. HARRIS BILL TO RESTORE AND PROTECT
NORTHWEST CALIFORNIA PUBLIC LANDS AND RIVERS**

Measure would support local economies and improve forest health and wildfire resiliency

Businesses, community leaders, and conservationists from across the region today applauded the introduction of legislation by Rep. Jared Huffman and Sen. Kamala Harris that would protect and restore some of Northwest California's most unique lands and waters, improve community safety from fire, and help local communities capitalize on the region's reputation as an outstanding destination for fishing, hunting, hiking, mountain biking, and other outdoor recreation opportunities.

The Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation, and Working Forests Act would conserve approximately 262,000 acres as wilderness, designate 379 miles of new wild and scenic rivers, and create a special restoration area of more than 700,000 acres. The bill was crafted after years of input from business leaders, conservationists, anglers, mountain bikers, fire management professionals, and other stakeholders interested in the enjoyment and well-being of these iconic lands.

Visitors come to this region from around the globe to fish for steelhead and salmon, float the rivers, hike and mountain bike the backcountry trails, and find solitude in primeval redwood groves. The legislation will support the regional economy and enhance outdoor recreation opportunities by spurring new infrastructure and upgrades to old roads, trails and camping facilities, and by improving forest health and resilience to wildfire.

"As a local business owner, I am glad to see the introduction of the Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation, and Working Forests Act," said **Aaron Ostrom, co-owner of Pacific Outfitters**. "My father started our business in 1968 and my brother and I have continued the family tradition of helping people get the gear they need to explore, camp, fish, and hunt across our region. These beautiful places support all of our local businesses, since people come to the area to explore and shop while they are here."

According to the Outdoor Industry Association, outdoor recreation generates \$92 billion in consumer spending and 691,000 direct jobs in California. Residents of the state's 2nd congressional district spend \$1.93 billion annually on outdoor recreation, and 134 outdoor companies are based here.

"The Trinity River is one of those special steelhead fisheries where you can have multiple fish days. It's kind of unique in that way," said **fishing guide Leslie Ajari**. "Rivers like this can provide a really good quality of life. We have to think in bigger terms about how to keep watersheds like the Trinity productive as habitat and as places where fishing helps support local economies. I'm very pleased that Rep. Huffman's and Sen. Harris's bill will do this for the Trinity and other important streams in one of the last great steelhead strongholds in North America."

The legislation would establish the Elk Camp Ridge Recreation Trail for off-highway vehicles and mountain bikes, and the Horse Mountain Special Management Area. It would also call for developing a Regional Trails Plan and studying the feasibility of establishing The Bigfoot National Recreation Trail, which would highlight the world-renowned botanical and biological diversity found in this region..

"I started backpacking in the 1970s after returning from the Vietnam War," said **U.S. Navy veteran Steve Robinson**. "Like many veterans, the adjustment back to civilian life was difficult. Backpacking was and still is my therapy. I believe we all need to spend more time in parks and wilderness, but public land is especially important for those of us with PTSD or other forms of trauma. I am very grateful to Rep. Huffman and Sen. Harris for recognizing the importance of public lands for all of us to heal and connect with our wild lands."

"We are enthusiastic about the expanded mountain biking opportunities that this legislation would create, including trails in Del Norte County and a Trinity Lake Trail," said **Tom Phillips, Chair of the Redwood Coast Mountain Bike Association**. "It also would authorize the Horse Mountain Special Management Area and a Regional Trail Study to create and expand even more mountain biking trails in the future."

The legislation will help cleanup public lands and waters impacted by trespass marijuana grows by creating a local, state, federal and tribal partnership to coordinate activities and provide resources and expertise.

"Pristine public forests are currently experiencing an emerging new threat from the destructive ramifications associated with illegal cultivation of cannabis," said **Mourad Gabriel, Ph.d, Executive Director, Integral Ecology Research Center**. "Rep. Huffman's and Sen. Harris's continued forward vision is necessary for those invested in this topic to gain a foothold and start to effectively address this misuse of our public lands."

The measure would also help improve community fire safety by creating a network of roadside shaded fuel breaks in the South Fork Trinity-Mad River Restoration Area, and requiring the US Forest Service and the BLM to work with local residents to create a new coordinated fire management plan for all of the designated wilderness areas in the region.

The Northwest California Wilderness, Recreation, and Working Forests Act was built from the ground up to protect the unique public lands and waters of Northwest California, enhance outdoor recreation opportunities, help safeguard local residents and communities from catastrophic wildfire, restore vital fish and wildlife habitat, and boost the regional tourist and recreation economy.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

Public TV series This American Land segment on local efforts to protect Northwest California
<https://youtu.be/FClqYjm6bhY?t=89>

Also see Northwest California Mountains and Rivers support website: <https://mountainsandrivers.org/>

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The Northwest Mountains and Rivers Campaign is a coalition of conservation organizations, business owners, land owners, biologists, hunters, anglers mountain bikers, and other community members who support congressional efforts to protect special places, restore watersheds and fisheries, support economic development, enhance recreational opportunities, and protect communities.