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Devil's Staircase Wilderness Hearing Held in Senate Subcommittee *Administration Again Testifies in Support of the Oregon Coast Range Proposal*

Washington, DC — Today, the Obama administration again testified in support of the proposed Devil's Staircase Wilderness at a Senate subcommittee hearing. The bill to protect the 29,650 acres of rainforest in the central Oregon Coast Range was introduced by Oregon Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley in June.

Jay Jensen, Deputy Undersecretary, Natural Resources and the Environment, Department of Agriculture, as well as Marcilynn Burke, Deputy Director of the Bureau of Land Management, reaffirmed the administration's support for the proposal at the hearing. Local conservation groups working to safeguard the area expressed their excitement with the outcome of the hearings.

"The events in Congress over the past week have inched us one step closer to preserving this historic remnant of the Oregon Coast Range," says Josh Laughlin, Conservation Director of Cascadia Wildlands. "This wild area needs nothing less than a Wilderness designation."

The Devil's Staircase area is named after a series of stair-step waterfalls carved into the sandstone bedrock of Wasson Creek, the main waterway that passes through the wilderness. The densely forested area is home to a host of endangered species, including Oregon coastal coho salmon, marbled murrelet and northern spotted owl, and provides an entirely off-trail experience for skilled backcountry adventurers.

Conservation organizations have long sought a Wilderness protection for this old-growth rainforest dating back to the 1970s after federal logging proposals were planned in the area. Although originally on the 1984 Oregon Wilderness Bill that protected nearby places like Drift Creek and Cummins Creek, Devil's Staircase was stripped out during negotiations.

A renewed wilderness campaign resumed in 2007 after the Bureau of Land Management, the federal agency that manages the eastern quarter of the proposal area, outlined plans to log the area during a forest plan revision.

Today's events follow on the heels of a House subcommittee hearing on October 1 where testimony was also heard from administration witnesses in support of the proposal. Mark-up on the bills and Congressional voting could happen as early as the end of 2009.