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Northwest Rafting Co.

Protecting O&C Lands

The Kalmiopsis backcountry

Location: Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest, southwestern Oregon

Acres: 250,000

Ecological value: Wild rivers, native salmon, rare plants, and ancient forests

Economic value: Kayaking, fishing, and backcountry recreation

What are the O&C Lands

In 1866, Congress established a land-grant program for the Oregon & California (O&C) Railroad Co. to spur the completion of the rail line between Portland and San Francisco that required the company to sell the deeded land to settlers. Forty years later, when the company failed to meet the terms of the agreement fully, the federal government reclaimed more than 2 million acres of mostly forested land. Today, those O&C lands remain undeveloped and are administered by the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service.

Just west of the small town of Cave Junction, in the heart of southern Oregon's Klamath-Siskiyou region, lies the 180,000 acre Kalmiopsis Wilderness. Named for an endemic pre-Ice Age plant found there, the area has a unique and rich botanical diversity that draws visitors from around the world. The mosaic of high ridges and river valleys produce several microclimates that support rain forests, dry pine forests, and alpine grasslands. In 1964, the Kalmiopsis wilderness was one of the original areas protected by Congress under the federal Wilderness Act. Now the approximately 250,000 acres of adjacent wild backcountry that surrounds it also deserves wilderness protection under the law.

Some of the clearest and most pristine rivers in the West course through this rugged, roadless landscape. Wild creeks, including the Rough and Ready, the Indigo, and the Silver, serve as invaluable strongholds for healthy runs of Chinook and steelhead salmon, and they also offer outstanding opportunities for fishing and kayaking.

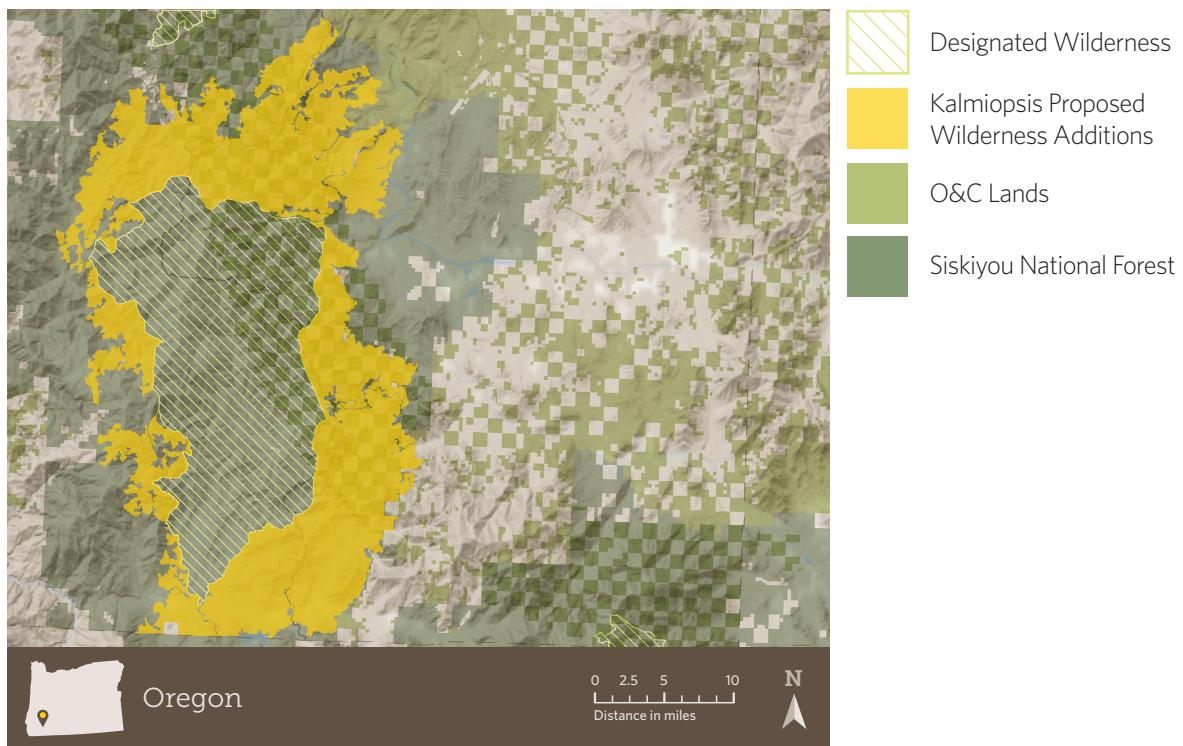
This natural splendor attracts visitors from nearby and around the world. Hiking, boating, fishing, and camping all create jobs and economic stability for the local community.

The unique geography and geology of the Kalmiopsis backcountry areas have created habitat for a remarkable variety of plants. Two dozen species of coniferous trees, including Douglas fir, mountain hemlock, weeping spruce, coastal redwoods, and Jeffrey and ponderosa pine, thrive there. Of the more than 3,500 plant species found in the region, more than 280 can be found nowhere else on Earth.* The rare trees and flowering plants also support more than 200 species of butterflies and 400 species of birds.

Pure rivers, wild salmon, roadless land, and the prospect of enveloping solitude make the backcountry surrounding the Kalmiopsis Wilderness a refuge of unique natural value that should be forever safeguarded by the nation's Wilderness Act.

* D.A. DeSalla et al., "A Global Perspective on the Biodiversity of the Klamath-Siskiyou Ecoregion," National Areas Journal (1999).

Kalmiopsis proposed wilderness additions



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