

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

August 3, 2018

Todd Davidson, Executive Director
Travel Oregon
530 Center St NE, Suite 200
Salem Oregon, 97301

Dear Mr. Davidson:

We are writing to request that Travel Oregon undertake a study on the economic impact that the 2018 wildfire season is having on Oregon's normally robust outdoor recreation and tourism economy. In particular, this year we are concerned about the impact on the Rogue and Deschutes rivers' local economic areas, although we know that profound impacts on local economies have a ripple effect on the state and regional economies.

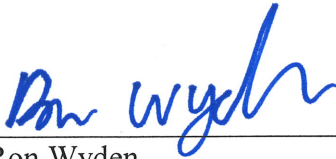
In southern Oregon over the past weekend, the United States Forest Service (USFS) and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) indicated that due to the fast moving fires in Josephine and Jackson counties, there was a strong chance that public access to parts of the Rogue River might be closed. Luckily, no lives or structures have been lost, yet the threats of the Taylor Creek fire, and the adjacent Gardner fire, have led the agencies to issue evacuation notices to more than 1,000 people. Furthermore, this is the second year in a row that the air quality in southern Oregon has ranked among the worst in the nation, which will undoubtedly have a negative long-term impact on tourism.

The Rogue River is one of the country's premier recreation destinations. It was one of America's first designated Wild and Scenic Rivers (1968) and is prime habitat for salmon and steelhead. According to the BLM, the Rogue River attracts more than 128,000 visitors every year. Recreation on the Rogue contributes more than \$30 million annually to the local economy, and supports hundreds of good jobs like rafter guides, outfitters, and boaters. Tourism and recreation on the Deschutes River generate nearly \$60 million a year. The fires in Wasco and Sherman Counties have forced rafters and anglers off of the lower Deschutes River during peak tourism season and other people are canceling their trips. At a time when fishers, rafters, and guides should be utilizing the recreation opportunities in Oregon, dangerous fire and unhealthy smoke choke off opportunities on our rivers and for the surrounding business owners.

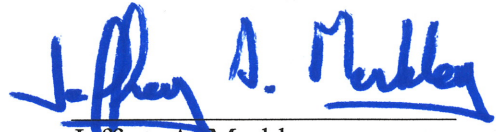
In addition to access to the premier rivers, many businesses in Oregon utilize and rely on outdoor spaces for all sorts of events. The Oregon Shakespeare Festival in Ashland, Britt Festival in Jacksonville, the Jackson County Fair in Central Point, and wineries with outdoor tasting areas have all been severely impacted by the unhealthy air in the Rogue Valley. Last year, it was numerous events in the Gorge that were affected. Many shows and events were cancelled at significant economic loss to the organizations as well as the retail and service industries that depend on attendees' expenditures.

We appreciate the work you have already done to quantify the impact of last year's fires on the tourism industry in Oregon. Given the profound consequences of last year's fires, we request you analyze, in detail, the economic consequences and compounding effect of the 2018 wildfire season on Oregon communities.

Sincerely,



Ron Wyden
United States Senator



Jeffrey A. Merkley
United States Senator