



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 18, 2026

Tommy Hough
 WaterWatch of Oregon (and coalition)
tommy@waterwatch.org
<https://waterwatch.org>

Giveaway of Mt. Hood National Forest Public Land to Facilitate Greater Data Center Water Use Threatens Watershed, Fish

The proposed giveaway of 150 acres from the Mt. Hood National Forest would also set a dangerous precedent that could be replicated across the west.

The Dalles, Oregon — A coalition of angling, land-use and conservation organizations representing tens of thousands of Oregonians submitted a letter today to Oregon Senator Ron Wyden voicing their opposition to HR 655, a bill introduced by Congressman Cliff Bentz (R-OR 2) that would transfer approximately 150 acres of federal public land from the Mt. Hood National Forest to the City of The Dalles, home to a Google data center campus with skyrocketing water and energy demands. The bill passed in the House of Representatives on Dec. 9th and is now before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, where Sen. Wyden is a committee member.

About 80 percent of The Dalles' annual water supply comes from the Dog River — an important snowmelt tributary to the Hood River. The Hood River is an important cold water refuge for five runs of imperiled salmon and steelhead listed as threatened or endangered under the Endangered Species Act. These fish also use the Dog River.

For roughly a century, The Dalles never used more than about 12 cubic feet of water per second from the Dog River. Recently, The Dalles doubled the capacity of the pipeline that transfers water out of the Hood River watershed to the South Fork of Mill Creek, home of The Dalles reservoir subject to this proposed land giveaway. To facilitate an even greater volume of water for the city,

despite negligible population growth in recent years, the bill would give away approximately 150 acres so that The Dalles can triple the capacity of the reservoir that collects water from the Dog River.

HR 655 would also enable The Dalles to approximately double its extraction of water from the Hood River Basin and avoid federal oversight of the reservoir operations by converting reservoir related public lands to municipal ownership. By enlarging the reservoir and using the newer pipeline, The Dalles is now capable of drying up the Dog River, except for a small .5 cubic foot per second bypass flow at the pipeline intake.

Despite claims to the contrary, and claims by Rep. Bentz that he does not know what the water will be used for because he never asked The Dalles, much of the water appears to be intended for Google data center use in The Dalles, reflecting the trend of new demands for water (and energy) to serve data centers that have increased around the western United States over the last several years. These new additive demands for water often come at the expense of local agricultural water use and impact imperiled species that frequently are already impacted by water scarcity.

The Dalles was even involved in a lawsuit against *The Oregonian* filed to prevent release of public records related to Google's water use in The Dalles. Google paid the attorney fees of The Dalles in that litigation. Despite being one of the world's wealthiest corporations, Google has already received about \$260 million in state and local tax breaks at its campus in The Dalles.

Described in the coalition letter as a "cynical sweetheart deal," HR 655 would reward "bad faith" behavior by Google and The Dalles in sidestepping important conservation laws and triple water storage for area data centers without any consideration of harm to other water users. The project would also likely impact already-skyrocketing utility costs.

In addition to what would be a dangerous precedent in terms of corporations' access to limited water supplies in the West, HR 655 would also enable inroads for resource extractors to attack America's public lands heritage — already under assault in this Congress with attempts to undermine the Boundary Waters Wilderness in Minnesota, Grand Staircase-Escalante National Monument in Utah, and Senator Mike Lee's recent attempt to privatize public lands in the 2025 Reconciliation bill.

John DeVoe, senior advisor for WaterWatch of Oregon:

"We would like to see Senator Wyden and the Senate act to ensure that data centers and associated energy and water development in Oregon stay off public lands, and that their development does not harm rivers and streams like the Dog River and Hood River, other water users, roadless areas, and already imperiled salmon and steelhead in the Hood and Columbia rivers. Privatization or transfer of public lands to subsidize the wealthiest corporations on the planet, like Alphabet/Google, which has a market capitalization of almost \$4 trillion, should absolutely be off the table. These corporations have the assets to fend for themselves."

James Adkins, executive director of the Association of Northwest Steelheaders:

“Regardless of the intended use of the cool, clean water that originates from these invaluable public lands, the proposed transfer would allow the reservoir expansion to bypass federal environmental review and public comment. Doing so would effectively silence the voices of the over four million people who visit the Mt. Hood National Forest each year. The downstream consequences of this public land transfer would be severe. The Dog River and Hood River watersheds supply essential cold water to the Columbia River above Bonneville Dam, where temperatures are already exceeding the 72 degree biological threshold for salmon and steelhead survival. Further diverting this cold mountain water could jeopardize endangered salmon, steelhead, sturgeon, and lamprey populations.”

Jordan Latter, Forest Watch program manager at Bark:

“One-third of Oregonians rely on Mt. Hood’s watersheds for their drinking water and irrigation, including rural communities like The Dalles and farmers in the Hood River valley. All Oregonians rely on public places like Mt. Hood to be managed for the benefit of all. This bill seems designed to benefit Google and would increase water costs for these communities. We are calling on Senator Wyden to stand up for Oregonians and protect our communities from exploitation by wealthy and powerful corporations.”

Members of the coalition that signed the letter opposed to HR 655 includes the Association of Northwest Steelheaders, Bark, Bird Alliance of Oregon, Columbia Riverkeeper, Friends of the Columbia Gorge, Native Fish Society, Northwest Environmental Advocates, Northwest Guides and Anglers Association, Oregon Wild, Save Our wild Salmon, Sierra Club, Thrive Hood River, WaterWatch of Oregon, and the Western Environmental Law Center.

#