The Wild on Wilderness Committee (WOW) is currently in the process of organizing a Wilderness Conference to promote the need to establish permanent wilderness protection for the remaining 200,000 acres of roadless areas here in the Umpqua Basin. The conference, titled "Wilderness: Our Community, Our Future," will be scheduled for Saturday, November 7th, 2009, and will be hosted on the campus of Umpqua Community College (UCC) in Jacoby Hall which seats 1,000 people.

Our goal with this conference is to define and understand the human relationship to wilderness by highlighting the shared benefits of wilderness for all citizens. We plan for a host of speakers, panels, and breakout sessions that will highlight the importance of backcountry wilderness for the invaluable services it provides. We also hope to educate legislators, business leaders, and local politicians about the need for wilderness designation in a natural landscape facing a host of new, unprecedented threats, such as climate change and continued development.

The Umpqua region is a special place in the hearts of many Oregonians known for its beautiful rivers, especially the North and South Umpqua Rivers and their tributaries. The Umpqua National Forest and its watershed have some of the most spectacular old wild areas on the west coast.

The WOW committee has been working on wilderness designation in the Umpqua National Forest for many years. The wilderness conference will focus on the many different values of wilderness, including:

- Water quality
- Fisheries and wildlife habitat
- Economic benefits of conservation
- Threats to wildlands
- Tourism
- History of wilderness
- Effects of climate change on wilderness
- Protecting biodiversity
- Indigenous people and the land ethic
- Interfaith values of wilderness

We plan to follow the Saturday conference with a day of group hikes into the proposed wild areas, so that conference attendees can get a first-hand glimpse of just how pristine these threatened areas are.

The committee meets to discuss the Wilderness Conference on the first Tuesday of every month at McMenamins in Roseburg. We are currently at work identifying potential speakers and panel members, as well as identifying which conservation groups throughout the Pacific Northwest that would be willing to offer their support.

The success of the conference depends on enlisting as much help from community members, activists, and other conservation groups as possible. We have a 1,000 seat auditorium to fill this November, and we need that many people with energy and good will to help us do it. This is a great opportunity for veteran activists, as well as newcomers, to get involved defending our remaining truly wild places on the Umpqua.

If you have anything you could contribute, please feel free to contact Hudson Spivey, Wilderness Conference Chairperson, at holspivey@gmail.com, or Co-Chairperson Bob Hoehn at oh0917@hotmail.com with your questions or ideas.

Thank you!
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