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MERKLEY ANNOUNCES \$15 MILLION FOR THE OPAL CREEK PROMISE

September 21, 2023

Washington, D.C. – Oregon’s U.S. Senator Jeff Merkley announced today that Business Oregon and the U.S. Forest Service have signed an agreement to fund the full \$15 million Opal Creek Promise.

“This funding has been nearly thirty years in the making and is a major achievement for Marion County and everyone who lives or visits the Santiam Canyon,” said Senator Merkley. “Sen. Hatfield saw the opportunity for the Opal Creek Wilderness and led the dedication in 1996, and today we are able to fulfill that promise and secure the full \$15 million that was originally authorized.”

In 1996, 37,500 acres of forest was designated as the Opal Creek Wilderness and Congress, led by former Oregon Senator Mark Hatfield, authorized \$15 million in federal funding to support economic development and secure support from communities in the Santiam Canyon for the legislation.

Following the devastating 2020 Labor Day fires, Merkley – as Chair of the Interior Appropriations Subcommittee – included funding to fulfill the Opal Creek Promise in the fiscal year 2023 disaster supplemental. This \$12 million, combined with \$3 million in previous funding from community-initiated project awards, will fulfill former Sen. Hatfield’s promise to Marion County and the surrounding area, help the region continue to recover from the fires, and contribute to its long-term economic development

“The citizens of the Santiam Canyon have waited for almost 30 years for Congress to deliver on this promise. These funds come at a time that will help support recovery from the 2020 wildfires and the continued reduction in sustainable timber harvest. We look forward to this investment making a long term, positive impact to this beautiful, rural area of Marion County,” said Marion County Commissioner Kevin Cameron.