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U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources' Subcommittee on National Parks

Testimony in Support of S. 192, The River Democracy Act of 2021

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Thank you, Chairman King, Ranking Member Daines, and Sub-Committee members. My name is Andrea Malmberg. I appreciate the opportunity to speak with you about an important bill before you, the River Democracy Act of 2021.

I am a rancher from Union County, Oregon. With my husband, Tony, I have run a direct-to-consumer grassfed beef and lamb business for over 20 years. In addition, as a rangeland consultant, I have had the opportunity to work with ranchers and farmers worldwide, assisting within my network, the regeneration of over 32 million acres.

I was raised and have lived on the land with livestock my whole life – first as a daughter of a cattle buyer in Montana and South Dakota and as an adult, a ranch owner and land steward in Wyoming and now Oregon.

I hold a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture and a Master of Science in Natural Resources from Washington State University. Seeing the need to bring the tools of human flourishing to rural communities, I received a Master in Applied Positive Psychology from the University of Pennsylvania. As a result, I have created a platform that people, particularly those in agriculture, can use to enhance their well-being.

My husband and I are long-time members of the Farm Bureau, the Wyoming Stock Growers, and the Oregon Cattlemen's Association. In 1998 we were honored to receive the National Cattlemen's Beef Association's Environmental Stewardship Award. We, and many others in the regenerative agriculture space, have demonstrated that enhancing ecological health and profitable livestock production is not a zero-sum game. The land bases we have influenced have empirical data to prove up. True profitability can be realized when we regenerate land and water resources. In turn, we see the enhanced quality of life of our families and rural communities.

I am specifically speaking to you today as a citizen of Union County, Oregon. For those of you who aren't familiar with Union County, it is in the state's northeast corner. With just under 27,000 residents, it likely has more livestock than it does people. For context, my county is twice the size of Rhode Island and larger than Delaware. It is about half privately owned, divided between forest, rangeland, and irrigated pastures and crops. The other half is primarily National Forest.

Many of the streams in Union County still have salmon, steelhead, or bull trout populations or supply water to streams that do have these species. And, while some wildlife is abundant, like elk, deer, and turkey, much of our biodiversity is declining. There is a clear connection between ecological degeneration on both private and public lands and the lack of vitality of the economies

of our region. The River Democracy Act of 2021 gives us a leg up to build resiliency in the natural resources we depend upon.

My business relies on the water that flows from our National Forest lands for my livestock and livelihood. I produce forage by utilizing the water from Catherine Creek and Little Creek, tributaries of the larger and better-known Grand Ronde River. These smaller streams are critical for my ranching business and essential to the health of the Grande Ronde River watershed - its wildlife, fisheries, and economies.

Moreover, my hometown of Union's water quality, infrastructure, and economy depend on what happens upstream, whether the waterway is on private or federal lands. We all rely on the flows from the headwaters. If we continue neglecting our floodplains' health, fires and flooding will further erode infrastructure and threaten our livelihoods. Windblown trees and ice jams are already threatening the City of Union due to channelization and outdated infrastructure that disconnects rivers from their floodplains. Imagine what would happen if a fire took over our forest lands, leaving little ground cover to slow snowpack melting.

Fire has always been a natural force and a land management tool used by people for millennia, but we are in a new era. Now we are faced with massive wildfires having a severe impact on forests, clean water, and our communities. With the fire management tools offered in the Act, we are less likely to see huge amounts of sediment choking creeks, flooding out private properties, and silting in irrigation systems. The more we can appreciate the value of and our dependence on the health of the network of streams and rivers in my corner of the state, the better off we will all be.

That is why when Senators Wyden and Merkley announced a public process to consider the conservation of rivers on public lands in Oregon that are particularly important for clean water and habitat, I took a keen interest. As someone who has been a professional, locally based consensus-building facilitator on thorny natural resources issues, it is highly unusual for politicians to ask you what you think *before* they do something. Their willingness to listen to Oregonians continues even now that the bill has been introduced. I suggest all members of Congress consider this democratic approach. This is how democracy is supposed to work. It is the Oregon way.

I strongly support the balanced approach that Senators Wyden and Merkley have employed through the development of the River Democracy Act. Through this bill, we have an opportunity to build resilience downstream by restoring the waterways upstream — protecting and enhancing the value of private property and water rights.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify.