

## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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### **Forest Service approves privatization of Bagby Hot Springs, 27 other Mt. Hood recreation sites**

Today the Forest Service released a decision to grant a private concessionaire permit for management of Bagby Hot Springs and 27 other developed recreation sites in Mt. Hood National Forest, the last remaining sites under public management. This decision comes one year after a public backlash over the contentious proposal to transfer management to private companies was first announced. Bark, the local environmental group dedicated to protecting and restoring Mt. Hood National Forest, plans to appeal the decision.

Last year the Forest Service, which is charged with managing recreation on national forest lands like Mt. Hood, renovated the historic Bagby Hot Springs with no notice or public process, dismissing volunteers who helped maintain the site for decades. It then announced plans to grant management of 27 campgrounds to California Land Management Services Corporation with no public process or notification. After a clamoring public raised vocal concern regarding the lack of public input on the decision to change the iconic Bagby site and transfer management of popular campgrounds, Mt. Hood staff agreed to hold an “open house” and open a public comment period. Public comments were overwhelmingly opposed to the change in management, identifying several concerns at the outcome of concessionaire management. Some common concerns included:

- Expected increase of user fees at Bagby Hot Springs and campgrounds, including a likely fee for soaking at Bagby;
- A history of poor management by concessionaires in Mt. Hood resulting in increased public safety concerns and lacking knowledge of the area by camp hosts;
- A loss of institutional knowledge and recreation focus within Mt. Hood staff;
- Frustration over public resources being privatized, despite public funds supporting the infrastructure;
- A clear diversion from the agency’s own recommendations for maintaining these sites generated in their 2007 Recreation Facility Assessment.

Mt. Hood’s decision notice indicates the agency’s awareness that the public does not support privatization of management for recreation in Mt. Hood, and yet provides no analytic justification for moving forward with privatization of management. Bark’s concern over the way this process was managed, the management of public resources

for private profit, and the fact that this decision will result in near-compulsory perpetual private management of these recreation sites has driven the organization's commitment to monitor the process over the past year.

Olivia Schmidt, Bark's Program Director, addresses the group's commitment to challenge this decision:

"The Forest Service wants to use our tax dollars to issue permits to private companies that will then charge us to hike and camp in Mt. Hood National Forest. We don't think that is a just decision."

"The Forest Service's decision to transfer management of Mt. Hood recreation to private management defies the agency's own 2007 Recreation Facility Analysis and points to a dangerous trend in Mt. Hood; a preference for privatizing public resources as the one and only solution to budget restraints."

"While we understand the difficult budget conditions facing agencies like the Forest Service, recreation in Mt. Hood makes this area special and is an economic engine for adjacent communities and the state. Congress should be held accountable for undermining this critical resource and the Forest Service should be forced to explain why it is spending more money planning logging in Mt. Hood National Forest while it lets recreation suffer."

"Mt. Hood National Forest provides recreation opportunities for millions of visitors each year and yet the Forest Service is spending taxpayer money to issue permits for private companies to take over recreation management and then charge users more money. It doesn't make sense."

### About Bark

Founded in 1999, Bark is committed protecting and restoring Mt. Hood National Forest and to protecting public access to public lands and to ensuring that quiet recreation is a priority for management in Mt. Hood National Forest. It has a vision for Mt. Hood in which local communities have a social, cultural, and economic investment in its restoration and preservation.