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HOOKED ON DESCHUTES — Gov. Vic Atiyeh, who has long had a personal interest in Deschutes River angling, kicked off a public campaign Friday to raise \$1 million worth of donations for the purchase of the lower 12 miles of river bank on Oregon's "queen of rivers."

Campaign for Deschutes River fund-raising open to public

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SALEM — The campaign to purchase the lower 12 miles of river bank along the Deschutes River officially was opened to the public Friday by Gov. Vic Atiyeh.

"We use barbed hooks; we do not put any back," Atiyeh said of money-raising efforts to put together a \$1.6 million purse for the purchase.

Approximately \$1.8 million is being sought by the Oregon Wildlife Heritage Foundation to buy the property from the Eastern Oregon Land Co. The additional money will pay interest and costs for the fund-raising campaign.

Once purchased, the land would be placed in public ownership under the State Parks Division, although most current grazing leases to local landowners and public access would remain unchanged.

The property is accessible from the river and one road on the river's west bank. Hikers also may enter the lower canyon from the river's confluence with the Columbia.

The Wildlife Heritage Foundation is a non-profit organization that acts as a clearing house for funds to be used for wildlife projects throughout the state. Foundation directors agreed last year to organize the money-raising project for the Deschutes purchase.

Foundation leaders said Friday they have raised more than \$200,000 of the \$1 million public donations being sought.

"This is the kind of opportunity that rarely comes in a lifetime," Atiyeh told a large gathering of leaders from various statewide sportsmen's clubs and legislators. "For those of us who know and really love the Deschutes — I can close my eyes and see the section I fish; it keeps me going — it's a moment of great pride. We'll do our part in the legislature."

Atiyeh has had a personal interest in the purchase from the beginning last year, when Frank Amato, publisher of the Portland-based Salmon Trout Steelheader magazine, and Charles Voss, executive director of the Association of Northwest Steelheaders, brought the governor's attention to a private ad in the magazine soliciting for private funds to purchase the property for a fishing club.

Since then, the State Parks Division, the Heritage Foundation and the Fish and Wildlife Department have been working toward the purchase of the property for public use.

The state holds an option on the property through September, by which time officials hope to have raised the purchase price. Private interests are waiting in the wings in case the campaign fails.

Sen. Mike Thorne, D-Pendleton, who is chairman of the Senate Ways and Means subcommittee on transportation and natural resources, told the gathering that the state's portion of the purchase price, approximately \$800,000, will be placed in escrow pending the outcome of the foundation's campaign.

Among those in attendance were representatives of the Northwest Steelheaders, various fly-fishing clubs and organizations, several boating organizations, both the Oregon and National Wildlife Federation, the state chapter of the Izaak Walton League, The Dalles Rod and Gun Club, the Wildlife Artists Guild, the Deschutes Club and several Oregon business leaders.

All of the groups have pledged to raise four-fifths, the Oregon "Border Patrol" officer in past Blitz commercials. Curtis is starring in a new series of Blitz commercials that will include the Deschutes campaign.

Foundation officials announced that \$227,000 has been raised so far, with the bulk of the money anticipated from private foundations and corporations still to come in. Totals for those grants could exceed \$500,000, but are slow in accumulating because of the method each foundation has for processing applications.

The large unknown is how successful the campaigns will be from the various clubs and individual anglers — money that comes in \$5 to \$100 donations.

As organizations began itemizing their amounts to date, prior to the official start of individual money-raising, foundation eyebrows were raised by officials and Robert Pinson of Pinson Associates, a private fund-raising firm hired by the foundation.

Pinson said later that the campaign has momentum and should meet the September deadline. Foundation officials hope to have most pledges accumulated by late June.