March 28, 2017

Jamie Connell

Bureau of Land Management
Oregon State Office
P.O. Box 2965
Portland, OR 97208-2965

Dear Ms. Connell:

The Mazamas and The Mountaineers write in support of a 20-year mineral withdrawal of 340,079 acres of U.S. Forest Service land in the Methow Headwaters of Washington state. These lands should be declared off-limits to any new mining activities while Congressional leaders work on a permanent solution to protect this landscape.

The Mazamas, based in Portland, Oregon and founded in 1894 on the summit of Mt. Hood, is a nonprofit mountaineering education organization. Our mission is to “promote mountaineering through education, climbing, hiking, fellowship, safety and the protection of mountain environments.” We offer more than 700 hikes and 350 climbs annually throughout the Cascade Range.

The Mountaineers, based in Seattle, Washington and founded in 1906, is a nonprofit outdoor education, conservation, and recreation organization whose mission is “to enrich the community by helping people explore, conserve, learn about and enjoy the lands and waters of the Pacific Northwest and beyond.” The Mountaineers Books publishing division expands the mission internationally through award-winning publications including instructional guides, adventure narratives, and conservation photography. 1,800 skilled volunteers lead 3,200 outdoor education courses and activities annually for 16,000 members and guests. Our youth programs provide over 6,000 opportunities each year for children to get outside. We are a passionate, engaged, and knowledgeable community that cares about the outdoors, protecting the outdoor experience for current and future generations.

Our members value the quality of life benefits and access to exceptional close-to-home recreation of the Methow Valley offers. The Methow Valley is a popular destination for outdoor recreation of national significance. Due to the travel time to reach the Methow Valley, trips of a week or more are common with significant economic benefits to the local economy. Many of our local members are directly employed in the outdoor recreation industry.

The Methow Valley is one of the most important landscapes in the Pacific Northwest for outdoor recreation with a diversity of opportunities for the recreational pursuits our members enjoy. Dozens of Forest Service trails and the Pacific Crest Trail pass through the valley providing hiking and backpacking opportunities. Nordic skiers have access to the most extensive network of groomed trails in North America with over 120 miles to choose from. Backcountry skiers explore nearly endless terrain on the east slope of the Cascades. Climbers have easy access to Goat Wall, Fun Rock, and Propsector Wall while winter adventures can include ice climbing at Goat Wall and Gate Creek. For mountaineers, Golden Horn is a trip deep in a Forest Service roadless area that provides spectacular views of the North Cascades. Some of the best alpine climbing in the United States is a short drive up Highway 20 to the iconic Liberty Bell Group and Burgundy Spires at Washington Pass. These alpine destinations, that also include classic backcountry ski terrain such as Silver Star, are within the North Cascades Scenic Highway Zone that is currently withdrawn from mineral entry.[[1]](#footnote-1) This protection needs to be extended to include the rest of the nationally-significant outdoor recreation resources in the Methow Valley.

The national significance of the Methow Valley for outdoor recreation is due to the quality of all the opportunities described above that attracts visitors from across the country and around the world.

These high quality experiences for outdoor recreation are available throughout the year, in contrast to other outdoor recreation destinations that are more seasonal. An additional contributing factor to the national significance is the range of difficulty with some destinations challenging the nation’s top experts while others are suitable for families and serve as perfect teaching venues for those just learning the activities we enjoy. The local community, including many of the members we represent, has successfully built an outdoor recreation economy around these experiences that would be threatened by the development of a large scale mine on Flagg Mountain at the headwaters of the Methow watershed.

Industrial scale mining in the headwaters is simply incompatible with the recreational activities our members enjoy and the significant local economic benefits they provide. Polluted waters, disturbed lands and viewsheds, lost recreational access, and noisy industrial activity would erase the very reasons our members choose the Methow Valley as a recreation destination. Large-scale surface mining would drastically alter this landscape forever through impacts to water quality and the health of the surrounding landscape. According to reports compiled by the Environmental Protection Agency, the metal mining industry is the largest toxic polluter in the nation.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Given the mining threats that will undermine the significant community and regional investment in outdoor recreation in the Methow Valley, we request 20-year mineral withdrawal of 340,079 acres of U.S. Forest Service land in the Methow Headwaters of Washington state. This action is critical to protecting one of the most visited and beloved valleys in Washington state. Thank you for your consideration and leadership on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Adam Baylor, Stewardship and Advocacy Manager, The Mazamas

Katherine Hollis, Conservation and Advocacy Director, The Mountaineers

1. 75 FR 19999 - PUBLIC LAND ORDER NO. 7739; EXTENSION OF PUBLIC LAND ORDER NO. 6776; WASHINGTON [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. http://www.epa.gov/toxics-release-inventory-tri-program/2013-tri-national-analysis-comparing-industry-sectors [↑](#footnote-ref-2)