

Washington Outdoor Alliance

Access Fund • American Alpine Club • American Whitewater • El Sendero
Backcountry Ski and Snowshoe Club • Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance •
The Mountaineers • Washington Climbers Coalition • Washington Trails Association

February 22nd, 2016

Secretary Sally Jewell
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Chief Thomas Tidwell
U.S. Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, D.C. 20250-1111

Jim Peña, Regional Forester
Pacific Northwest Region (R6)
U.S. Forest Service
1220 SW 3rd Avenue
Portland, OR 97204-3440

Mike Williams
Forest Supervisor
Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest
215 Melody Lane
Wenatchee, WA 98801

*Re: Letter of Support for Withdrawal of Lands from Mineral Entry in the
Headwaters of the Methow River in the North Cascades of Washington State*

Dear Secretary Jewell, Chief Tidwell, Regional Forester Peña, and Supervisor Williams:

Washington Outdoor Alliance writes in support of protecting the Upper Methow Valley in the North Cascades from industrial-scale mining by administratively withdrawing the lands in the upper valley from mineral entry and exploration.

The Access Fund, American Alpine Club, American Whitewater, El Sendero Backcountry Ski and Snowshoe Club, Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance, The Mountaineers, Washington Climbers Coalition, and Washington Trails Association—all human-powered recreation organizations in Washington State—come together as a coalition on issues relating to recreation, access and conservation. As Washington Outdoor Alliance, we represent more than 35,000 members who recreate on public lands. Many of our members who value the quality of life benefits and access to exceptional close-to-home recreation of the Methow Valley live in the communities within the Methow valley. For the rest of our members across the state and visitors from around the country, 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 state of Washington and of national significance 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. Mountain bikers ride trails that include Slate Peak, Rendezvous Loop, and West Fork Methow, Yellow Jacket, Cutthroat, and Cedar Falls. They also ride the Methow Community trail which connects to other riding areas and the communities of Mazama and Winthrop. 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. Whitewater boaters enjoy the experiences on the Methow River and Chewuch that have easy access for day trips, while the Lost River offers one of the finest backcountry whitewater adventures in the North 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 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 attract 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

¹ 75 FR 19999 - PUBLIC LAND ORDER NO. 7739; EXTENSION OF PUBLIC LAND ORDER NO. 6776; WASHINGTON

surrounding landscape. According to reports compiled by the Environmental Protection Agency, the metal mining industry is the largest toxic polluter in the nation.²

Given the mining threats that will undermine the significant community and regional investment in outdoor recreation in the Methow Valley, we request that you work together and move quickly to initiate the process to administratively withdraw Flagg Mountain and appropriate surrounding national forest lands in the Upper Methow Valley from mineral exploration and entry for as long as possible, and to secure any funding that may be necessary to complete the withdrawal process. 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,

Joe Sambataro, Northwest Regional Director, Access Fund
Eddie Espinosa, Northwest Region Manager, American Alpine Club
Thomas O'Keefe, Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director, American Whitewater
Gus Bekker, President, El Sendero Backcountry Ski and Snowshoe Club
Yvonne Kraus, Executive Director, Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance
Katherine Hollis, Conservation and Recreation Director, The Mountaineers
Matt Perkins, Washington Climbers Coalition
Andrea Imler, Advocacy Director, Washington Trails Association

Cc: Senator Patty Murray, United States Senator
Senator Maria Cantwell, United States Senator
Representative Dan Newhouse, U.S. House of Representatives
Tom Vilsack, Secretary, Department of Agriculture
Neil Kornze, Director, U.S. Bureau of Land Management
Christy Goldfuss, Managing Director, White House Council on Environmental Quality
Jerome Perez, Washington and Oregon Office, U.S. Bureau of Land Management
Michael Liu, Methow Valley District Ranger, Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest

² <http://www.epa.gov/toxics-release-inventory-tri-program/2013-tri-national-analysis-comparing-industry-sectors>