

September 21, 2016

Senator Lisa Murkowski  
Chair, Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
709 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Maria Cantwell  
Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
511 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

**Re: September 22<sup>nd</sup> Energy and Natural Resources Hearing**

Dear Chair Murkowski and Ranking Member Cantwell:

Outdoor Alliance is a coalition of seven member-based organizations representing the human powered outdoor recreation community, including Access Fund, American Canoe Association, American Whitewater, International Mountain Bicycling Association, Winter Wildlands Alliance, the Mountaineers, and the American Alpine Club. Outdoor Industry Association is the national trade association for suppliers, manufacturers and retailers in the \$646 billion outdoor recreation industry, with more than 1200 members nationwide. The Conservation Alliance is an organization of outdoor businesses whose collective contributions support grassroots environmental organizations and their efforts to protect wild places where outdoor enthusiasts recreate. We work together to ensure that wild lands and rivers are preserved for recreation and conservation.

We appreciate the opportunity to offer the perspective of the outdoor recreation community and industry regarding several of the bills currently being heard by the committee. In summary, we:

- Strongly oppose measures to undercut the President’s ability to protect public lands using the Antiquities Act, including S. 437, S. 1416, and S. 3317;
- Support protecting conservation and recreation values in Southwest Oregon through S. 346, the Southwestern Oregon Watershed and Salmon Protection Act of 2015;
- Support S. 2991, the Methow Headwaters Protection Act of 2016, which would protect areas of spectacular recreation and conservation value from mining threats; and
- Support S. 3049, the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks Conservation Act, which would protect the Organ Mountains region and allow wilderness climbing areas to be managed in accordance with best climbing practices.



## Assaults on the Antiquities Act (S. 437, S. 1416, and S. 3317)

Our organizations strongly oppose S. 437, S. 1416, and S. 3317, all of which undercut the ability of the President to protect American public lands through the Antiquities Act.

Over the course of more than a century, nearly every president from each political party has employed the Antiquities Act to protect treasured places on America's public lands. While the Act is dedicated to protection of areas of historic or scientific significance, protection of outdoor recreation opportunities has been among the Act's invaluable additional benefits. While our preference is to protect recreation assets through legislation, when that pathway no longer becomes viable, we need a tool in place to ensure these important places are being protected for the next generation of outdoor enthusiasts.

Recent use of the Antiquities Act has helped to ensure access to outdoor recreation for a diversity of Americans, including those who live in big cities, through designation of the San Gabriel Mountains National Monument in Southern California and the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument in Southern New Mexico (see testimony on S. 3049 below), and to protect and advance the outdoor recreation economy and important conservation values in Colorado through designation of the Browns Canyon National Monument. The San Juan Islands National Monument in Washington, designated in 2013, is another iconic designation, which offers one of the most outstanding sea kayaking experiences in the world. These designations reflect the culmination of years of painstaking work by local communities to protect the myriad values provided by these landscapes.

Far from taking lands out of productive economic use, designations under the Antiquities Act are a proven economic driver for nearby communities. Studies repeatedly demonstrate that outdoor recreation opportunities, parks, and open space increase the value of nearby residential and commercial property, and that counties in the West with protected public lands like National Monuments are more successful at attracting fast-growing economic sectors and grow more quickly than counties without public lands. A recent series of studies analyzing the economies of communities adjacent to 17 National Monuments designated since 1982 found that key economic indicators all improved or maintained following designation, and in no case did designation lead to or coincide with an economic downturn.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Headwaters Economics, National Monuments: Economic Performance Before and After Designation. Available at <http://headwaterseconomics.org/dataviz/national-monuments/>, last visited Sept. 21, 2016.

We oppose efforts to undercut the efficacy of this bedrock conservation mechanism; at the same time look forward to working with Congress to protect the places and experiences that benefit outdoor recreation and local communities and economies.

### **S. 346, the Southwestern Oregon Watershed and Salmon Protection Act**

Outdoor Alliance, the Conservation Alliance, and Outdoor Industry Association support S. 346, the Southwestern Oregon Watershed and Salmon Protection Act of 2015. The bill will permanently protect the pristine and wild rivers in Southwestern Oregon by withdrawing approximately 106,000 acres of national public lands from new mining claims. These rivers include Hunter Creek, Pistol River, Rough and Ready Creek (a tributary to the Wild and Scenic Illinois River), Baldface Creek (tributary to the Wild and Scenic North Fork Smith River), and 17 miles of the Wild and Scenic Chetco River. The Act allows valid existing mining claims and existing uses to continue.

There is overwhelming local and regional support for protecting this landscape and these rivers from mining. Currently, the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management are pursuing a temporary mineral withdrawal in aid of S. 346. During the comment period for the NEPA process for this action, the public submitted over 35,000 comments in favor of withdrawing the area from new mining claims. According to the Forest Service, 23,000 of these comments were submitted during the Environmental Assessment phase and 99.9 percent of them were in support of protecting the area from mining. Additionally, on September 9<sup>th</sup>, 2015, nearly 300 local residents attended a public meeting in Gold Beach, Oregon, and every speaker who testified supported the action. A second public hearing was held the following night in Grants Pass, Oregon, and approximately 90 percent of the speakers testified in favor of the withdrawal.

There is such strong support for protecting these rivers because they provide clean drinking water for downstream communities and hold pristine habitat that supports world-class fisheries. They form the backbone of the local recreation economy by providing outstanding recreational opportunities—including fishing, hiking, camping and whitewater boating—that attract outdoor enthusiasts from around the world who provide millions of dollars in revenue for the local tourism-based economy. The sport-fishing industry of the Rogue River alone contributes \$16 million annually to the local economy.<sup>2</sup>

The Wild and Scenic Chetco, North Fork Smith, Illinois, and Rogue Rivers in particular flow through rugged landscapes and have been known as whitewater boating classics for decades for their outstanding whitewater, exceptionally pure water quality, and

<sup>2</sup> ECONorthwest, *The Economic Value of Rogue River Salmon*, p. 1 (January 2009). Available at <http://kswild.org/what-we-do-2/WildlandProtection/RogueSalmonFinalReport.pdf>, last visited September 20, 2016.

salmon runs. Whitewater paddlers also value their tributaries, including Baldface and Rough and Ready Creeks. Protecting these values is incredibly important to our members.

Congress recognized the value of part of this landscape by designating the Kalmiopsis Wilderness in 1964 and the Chetco, North Fork Smith, Illinois, and Rogue Rivers as Wild and Scenic.<sup>3</sup> The Forest Service has recognized these values as well, and found Baldface and Rough and Ready Creeks eligible for inclusion in the national Wild and Scenic system. These designations, however, do not protect this special place from the real threat of mining, which, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, is the largest source of toxic pollution in the country.<sup>4</sup> Our organizations strongly support permanently protecting the rivers in the region and the robust and sustainable economic activities they support from mining threats via S. 346.

### **S. 2991, the Methow Headwaters Protection Act of 2016**

Outdoor Alliance, the Conservation Alliance, and Outdoor Industry Association fully support S. 2291, which would help to protect the pristine and unique natural areas and ecosystems in the Methow Valley and the experiences this landscape provides.

Dozens of Forest Service trails and the Pacific Crest Trail pass through the Methow Valley, providing hiking and backpacking opportunities. Mountain bikers ride trails that include Slate Peak, Rendezvous Loop, West Fork Methow, Yellow Jacket, Cutthroat, and Cedar Falls, as well as 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, which 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 Prospector 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 also include classic backcountry ski terrain such as Silver Star.

<sup>3</sup> These rivers were designated in the following years: Chetco-1988, North Fork Smith-1988, Illinois-1984, and Rogue-1968 and 1988.

<sup>4</sup> See U.S. Environmental Protection Agency 2014 Toxic Release Inventory at <https://www.epa.gov/trinationalanalysis/comparing-industry-sectors-2014-tri-national-analysis>, last visited September 20, 2016.



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 that make the Methow Valley so iconic. Large-scale surface mining would drastically alter this landscape forever through impacts to water quality and the health of the surrounding landscape, and according to reports compiled by the Environmental Protection Agency, the metal mining industry is the largest toxic polluter in the nation.<sup>5</sup>

Our organizations strongly support permanent protection from mining threats for this landscape through S. 2991.

### **S. 3049, the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks Conservation Act**

Outdoor Alliance, the Conservation Alliance, and Outdoor Industry Association fully support S. 3049, which would protect the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks region and convert key Wilderness Study Areas into designated Wilderness areas. The bill is a product of a robust, community-driven process that determined appropriate Wilderness areas and associated provisions for those areas.

Rock climbing is a key cog in New Mexico’s outdoor recreation economy, and the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument includes nationally-renowned climbing. The National Monument provides outstanding recreation and natural experiences for the local community as well as visitors to the region. Outdoor Industry Association reports that in New Mexico the outdoor recreation economy supports over 47,000 jobs and generates \$184 million in annual state tax revenue. Climbing in Organ Mountains-

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.epa.gov/toxics-release-inventory-tri-program/2013-tri-national-analysis-comparing-industry-sectors>.



Desert Peaks National Monument certainly enhances the local recreation economy and helps to create more jobs for New Mexico’s second largest city, Las Cruces.

We believe that Wilderness designation for the Wilderness Study Areas within the Organ Mountains-Desert Peaks National Monument is a necessary step toward enhancing the climbing opportunities. Bureau of Land Management policy for climbing in Wilderness Study Areas is actually much more restrictive than for Wilderness Areas.<sup>6</sup> Wilderness designation will legalize new backcountry climbing opportunities and allow the Bureau of Land Management to align their climbing management strategies with current, best climbing practices.

\* \* \*

Thank you for considering the perspective of the outdoor recreation community and industry on these important pieces of legislation.

Best regards,



Adam Cramer  
Executive Director  
Outdoor Alliance



Amy Roberts  
Executive Director  
Outdoor Industry Association



John Sterling  
Executive Director  
The Conservation Alliance

- cc: Brady Robinson, Executive Director, Access Fund
- Wade Blackwood, Executive Director, American Canoe Association
- Mark Singleton, Executive Director, American Whitewater
- Bruce Alt, VP Government Relations, International Mountain Bicycling Association
- Mark Menlove, Executive Director, Winter Wildlands Alliance
- Tom Vogl, Chief Executive Officer, The Mountaineers
- Phil Powers, Executive Director, American Alpine Club

<sup>6</sup> BLM Manual 6330 prohibits fixed anchors (bolts) in Wilderness Study Areas, while BLM Manual 6340 allows fixed anchors in designated Wilderness Areas. Fixed anchors are a critical tool for the climbing safety system.

