



September 21, 2016

Chairman Lisa Murkowski
Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Ranking Member Maria Cantwell
Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Cantwell,

On behalf of The Mountaineers' 12,000 members, we write to submit testimony in strong support of the Methow Headwaters Protection Act of 2016 (S. 2991). We appreciate your willingness to give this bill the opportunity for a hearing.

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." 1,800 skilled Mountaineers volunteers lead 3,200 outdoor education courses and activities annually for 15,500 members and guests. Our youth programs provide over 6,000 opportunities each year for children to get outside. The Mountaineers Books publishing division expands the mission internationally through award-winning publications including instructional guides, adventure narratives, and conservation photography. We are a passionate, engaged, and knowledgeable community that cares deeply about protecting the outdoor experience for current and future generations.

We strongly support S. 2291, as it would help protect the pristine and unique natural areas and ecosystems in the Methow Valley and the recreational experiences this landscape provides.

The national significance of the Methow Valley for outdoor recreation is due to the myriad of high quality recreational opportunities that attract visitors from around the world to the area. The outdoor recreation opportunities in the Methow Valley are diverse and available throughout the year, in contrast to other outdoor recreation destinations that are more seasonal. They include activities such as cross-country skiing, hiking, mountain biking, fly fishing and hunting, just to name a few.

An additional contributing factor to the national significance is the broad range of available experiences, 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 a vibrant 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.



Dozens of Forest Service trails and the Pacific Crest Trail pass through the valley, providing hiking and backpacking opportunities. 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. Backcountry skiers explore nearly endless terrain on the east slope of the Cascades. Nordic skiers have access to the most extensive network of groomed trails in North America with over 120 miles to choose from. The area also boasts many other recreational resources for paddling, biking, and fishing and hunting.

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.¹

We enthusiastically support this proposal that would protect the nationally-significant recreational opportunities and the unique quality of life in the Upper Methow area that is characterized by stunning peaks, pastoral lands, beautiful riparian corridor, and undeveloped viewsheds.

Chairman Murkowski and members of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, thank you again for giving the Methow Headwaters Protection Act of 2016 (S.2201) a hearing and for the opportunity to provide testimony. The Mountaineers strongly supports this bill.

Respectfully submitted,

Tom Vogl

CEO, The Mountaineers

Katherine Hollis

Conservation and Advocacy Director, The Mountaineers

¹ <http://www.epa.gov/toxics-release-inventory-tri-program/2013-tri-national-analysis-comparing-industry-sectors>