

## 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

October 18, 2016

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary of Agriculture  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.  
Washington, DC 20250

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 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue  
Portland, OR 97204-3440

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

*Re: Request for Immediate Action on Methow Headwaters Mineral Withdrawal in Washington State*

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

On behalf of the 35,000 members that the coalition Washington Outdoor Alliance represents, we urge you to take immediate action to uphold the U.S. Forest Service's commitment to a mineral withdrawal for the Methow Headwaters region of Washington State.

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.

The Methow Valley's myriad of high-quality recreational opportunities make this area incredibly important to our members. 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, climbing, paddling, backcountry skiing. An additional contributing factor to the national significance of this place 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. 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.

We are very appreciative of your leadership on this issue, seen in Deputy Chief Weldon's testimony on September 22<sup>nd</sup> at the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, when he stated that the Department "believes a mineral withdrawal is the best path toward mitigating any impacts to the ecological, cultural and economic significance of the Methow Valley to the surrounding community." Deputy Chief Weldon also committed to working on a mineral withdrawal immediately. However, we are concerned by Secretary Vilsack's letter to Senator Murray dated October 12<sup>th</sup>, 2016 that referenced the mineral withdrawal process taking a "year or more" to complete the withdrawal application.

**We believe it is imperative to officially initiate the mineral withdrawal process by issuing a segregation notice before the end of the current term.** This process starts with an application filed by Region 6 in cooperation with Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest to the Washington/Oregon Bureau of Land Management Office by the end of October. Doing so will afford the best protection of the Methow Headwaters while the agencies evaluate the viability of a mineral withdrawal.

Thank you for continuing to move this issue forward on this, and please let us know if we can support your efforts in the coming weeks **to initiate the administrative mineral withdrawal process through the submission of a withdrawal application to the WA/OR BLM office by Monday, October 31st, 2016.**

Respectfully,

Gus Bekker, President  
El Sendero Backcountry Ski and Snowshoe Club

Eddie Espinosa, Policy Volunteer and Member  
American Alpine Club

Katherine Hollis, Conservation and Advocacy Director  
The Mountaineers

Andrea Imler, Advocacy Director  
Washington Trails Association

Yvonne Kraus, Executive Director  
Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance

Thomas O'Keefe, NW Stewardship Director  
American Whitewater

Matt Perkins, Board Member  
Washington Climbers Coalition

Joe Sambataro, NW Regional Director  
Access Fund