



November 6, 2017

Mike Williams, Forest Supervisor
Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest
Attention: Methow Headwaters Mineral Withdrawal
215 Melody Lane
Wenatchee, WA 98801

Re: Support for the Methow Headwaters Mineral Withdrawal; Submitted online

Dear Supervisor Williams,

On behalf of our 12,500 members, The Mountaineers writes to express our support for the proposed administrative withdrawal of U.S. Forest Service land in the headwaters region of the Methow Valley from mineral entry and exploration. We appreciate the opportunity to comment in favor of the 20-year withdrawal to protect the valley's unique character and the value of its ecological and recreational resources during the environmental review currently underway.

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 15,500 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.

The Methow Valley is one of the most important landscapes in the state of Washington and is of national significance for outdoor recreation with a diversity of opportunities for the recreational pursuits our members enjoy.

- **Hiking and Backpacking:** dozens of Forest Service trails and the Pacific Crest Trail pass through the valley providing hiking and backpacking opportunities.
- **Nordic Skiing:** nordic skiers have access to the most extensive network of groomed trails in North America with over 120 miles to choose from.
- **Backcountry Skiing and Snowboarding:** backcountry skiers explore nearly endless terrain on the east slope of the Cascades.
- **Rock and Alpine Climbing:** 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, 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.

We are also submitting in a separate comment letter a list of 1,189 petition signatures in support of the 20-year mineral withdrawal.

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 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 on this important issue.

The Mountaineers appreciates the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management for its effort in advancing the 20-year administrative mineral withdrawal for the Methow Headwaters. Thank you for hearing our voices and evaluating protection for this special place.

Sincerely,

Katherine Hollis,
Conservation and Advocacy Director

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

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