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Mining Proposal Near Mount St. Helens Revived *Conservation and Recreation Groups Opposed Due to Fish, Wildlife, and Recreation Impacts*

Portland, OR—Despite requests for a comment period extension from Senator Murray and conservation and recreation organizations, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Forest Service closed the public comment period yesterday for a mining exploration project in the Green River valley, just northeast of the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument. In the final hours of the deadline, Senator Murray's staff learned that the BLM intends to re-release the EA for another 30-day public comment period, though the BLM has made no official statement.

The project would permit exploratory drilling to locate deposits of copper, gold, and molybdenum and a potential mine on lands acquired with Land and Water Conservation Fund dollars. Nineteen conservation and recreation groups joined forces to oppose the proposal because it could significantly harm threatened salmon and steelhead populations in the Green River—a proposed Wild and Scenic River and Wild Steelhead Gene Bank—and myriad recreation opportunities in the area.

“Thousands of people have expressed opposition to this proposal due to its impacts on clean water, native fish and wildlife, and recreation. Yet the agencies continue to advance it,” said **Matt Little, Executive Director of Gifford Pinchot Task Force**. “Allowing mining exploration and development at the footsteps of a cherished icon and national monument, adjacent to a wild steelhead gene bank and proposed Wild and Scenic River, and near an active volcano is ludicrous. We will do all we can to stop it.”

The Goat Mountain exploratory drilling project was proposed by Ascot Resources Limited, a Canadian-based mining company. The project would include extensive industrial mineral operations on roughly 900 acres of public lands adjacent to Mount St. Helens National Monument, the Green River, and the Tumwater Inventoried Roadless Area. Project activities include: drilling 63 holes from 23 separate drill pads/sites, 24 hours/day, 7 days/week; construction/reconstruction of approximately 1.69 miles of existing decommissioned roads; installation of drilling-related structures and facilities including mine waste sumps (for disposal of drilling fluids/waste), containment buildings, water pumps and pipes, logging of trees and other vegetation within and along the roads and at each drill site; and the pumping of 5,000 gallons of groundwater per day.

Ascot Resources' proposal is not new. It is focused on the same mineral deposits as General Moly's 2005 proposal, which received 33,000 public comments in opposition and was ultimately denied by the BLM in 2008. Ascot Resources purchased the Margaret mineral rights from General Moly Inc. in 2010 and advanced the proposal at issue today. Gifford Pinchot Task Force filed suit in 2013, halting the project. In July 2014, Federal District Court Judge Hernandez, held the BLM and Forest Service violated numerous environmental laws in approving Ascot's

permits, including the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act (LWCFA). According to the ruling, the agencies violated the LWCFA by failing to recognize that use of the lands proposed for the exploration project (and any potential future mining development) cannot interfere with the outdoor recreational purposes for which the lands were acquired. The Forest Service purchased the lands in 1986 from the Trust for Public Land with Land and Water Conservation Fund dollars for conservation and recreation purposes.

“The Green River valley is a popular recreation destination for hikers, fishermen, hunters, bird watchers, paddlers, and backcountry horse enthusiasts who use the Green River Horse Camp, ancient forest trails, and backcountry lakes in the vicinity,” said **Tom Buchele, Managing Attorney of Earthrise Law Center**. “This project would severely impact those recreation opportunities due to noise, dust, exhaust fumes, lights, vehicle traffic, the physical presence of drill equipment, and project area closures. I cannot fathom how the Forest Service could legally conclude that drilling would not interfere with recreation without violating the LWCFA.”

In its latest attempt to conduct mining exploration, Ascot worked with federal agencies to address recreation impacts and other deficiencies in a modified environmental assessment. However, the assessment still fails to adequately address the impacts of mining exploration and development on recreation, water quality, and wild fish populations in the Green River.

“This prospecting is a threat to wild steelhead in the Green River and the rest of the Toutle and Cowlitz River system,” said **Steve Jones, President of Clark-Skamania Flyfishers**. “Washington fisheries managers made the Green a steelhead gene-bank river in 2014 because its habitat offered the best hope for sustaining wild fish in that system, a fact BLM and Ascot dismiss. This river drainage needs to be conserved, not exploited.”

“Mount St. Helens is no place for a mine,” said **Tom Uniack, Conservation Director for Washington Wild**. “The greater economic and social value of this incredible area lies with the equestrian, mountain biking, and other world-class recreational opportunities accessible to local residents and visitors alike.”

PROPOSAL DOCUMENTS:

Modified EA: [https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/projects/nepa/52147/66795/72638/Goat Mountain MEA 20151217 FINAL.pdf](https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/projects/nepa/52147/66795/72638/Goat_Mountain_MEA_20151217_FINAL.pdf).

GPTF et al comments: http://gptaskforce.org/our-work/mount-st.-helens/FINALGoatMountainMEAComments_24161.pdf.

Comment Period Extension Request Letter: <http://gptaskforce.org/our-work/mount-st.-helens/goat-mountain-letter-request-for-extension-jan-2016/>.

Senator Murray Letter: http://gptaskforce.org/our-work/mount-st.-helens/SenatorMurrayCommentPeriodExtensionLettertoBLM_12216.pdf.

LEGAL DOCUMENTS:

Judge Hernandez’s Opinion: <https://law.lclark.edu/live/files/17566-gifford-pinchot-mining-decisionpdf>.

MAPS/PHOTOS:

Mine area map: https://www.gptaskforce.org/our-work/st-helens-proposed-mine-area/image_view_fullscreen.

Visual of Green River valley: http://www.gptaskforce.org/our-work/conservation/mount-st.-helens/visual-of-green-river-valley/image_view_fullscreen.