



Methow Valley
Citizens Council



October 19, 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 3rd 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 nine undersigned national and state-based conservation and recreation organizations and millions of members and supporters, 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.

As stated in Deputy Chief Weldon's testimony on September 22nd at the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, 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." Also, upon questioning by Ranking Member Cantwell, Deputy Chief Weldon committed to working on a mineral withdrawal immediately.

However, Secretary Vilsack's letter to Senator Murray dated October 12th, 2016 demonstrates the agency's intent to begin the mineral withdrawal process and references taking a "year or more" to complete the withdrawal application.

We are grateful for this strong demonstration of support and commitment to safeguard the precious resources of the Methow Valley. However, taking "one year or more" is simply too long. Failure to act more quickly jeopardizes the precious resources of the Methow. This delay

also makes it very likely the community will have to stare down another exploratory drilling season on Flagg Mountain, which is one step closer to an industrial-scale mine in the Methow.

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. This swift action is essential to protect the area covered by S. 2991, *The Methow Headwaters Protection Act of 2016*, from an unseemly rush to stake new claims and to secure momentum into the next administration. Doing so will afford the best protection of the Methow Headwaters while the agencies evaluate the viability of a mineral withdrawal.

The undersigned organizations stand ready to support the agency throughout the mineral withdrawal process by mobilizing our members, engaging the community, and demonstrating overwhelming support. We will also work diligently to pass S. 2991, which will permanently protect the beloved lands and waters of the Methow Valley from the deleterious impacts of industrial-scale mining.

We deeply appreciate your leadership on this issue, and look forward to working with you and your staff 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. We know this timeline is short, but the agency—at all levels—has been aware of this withdrawal proposal for nearly two years. With leadership, commitment, and action, we are confident the agency can act swiftly.

Thank you for your commitment to protecting one of the crown jewels of the National Forest System and of the Pacific Northwest.

Sincerely,

Ben Greuel, Washington State Director
The Wilderness Society

Mitch Friedman, Executive Director
Conservation Northwest

Maggie Coon, Board Chair
Methow Valley Citizens Council

Tom Uniack, Executive Director
Washington Wild

Wendy McDermott, Director
Rivers of Puget Sound and Columbia Basin
American Rivers

Jason Keith, Senior Policy Advisor
Access Fund

Katherine Hollis, Director
Conservation and Advocacy Program
The Mountaineers

Andrea Imler, Advocacy Director
Washington Trails Association

Thomas O'Keefe, Stewardship Director
Pacific Northwest
American Whitewater

Cc: The Honorable Maria Cantwell, United States Senate
The Honorable Patty Murray, United States Senate
The Honorable Dan Newhouse, United States House of Representatives
The Honorable Sally Jewell, The Secretary of Department of Interior of the United States
Robert Bonnie, Under Secretary of Natural Resources and Environment, Department of
Agriculture
Leslie Jones, Deputy Under Secretary of Natural Resources and Environment,
Department of Agriculture
Glenn Casamassa, Associate Deputy Chief, U.S. Forest Service
Christy Goldfuss, Managing Director, White House Council on Environmental Quality
Neil Kornze, Director, Bureau of Land Management
Ron Dunton, Acting State Director, Oregon/Washington Office, Bureau of Land
Management
Michael Liu, Methow Valley District Ranger, Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest