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Methow Headwaters Protection Act Receives Senate Committee Hearing
Forest Service Supports S. 2991 and Action on Mineral Withdrawal

Winthrop, Wash. -- The Methow Headwaters Campaign today praised the U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources for holding a hearing on the *Methow Headwaters Protection Act of 2016* (S. 2991), and the supportive testimony of the U.S. Forest Service at the hearing.

The bill was introduced in May by U.S. Senator Patty Murray (D-WA) and cosponsored by U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA), who is also the ranking member on the Energy and Natural Resources Committee. The bill proposes a “mineral withdrawal” to make 340,000 acres of National Forest lands in the Methow Headwaters off-limits to the potential development of a large-scale copper mine.

Deputy Chief of the Forest Service, Leslie Weldon, testified in support of the bill, noting that, “The Department of Agriculture supports S. 2991 and 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.”

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In response to questions from Sen. Cantwell, Deputy Chief Weldon said that the forest service is committed to “working on and coordinating with the Bureau of Land Management on the process for the administrative withdrawal.”

Information on the hearing and Sen. Cantwell’s opening statement and questions are available on the committee’s website:

<http://www.energy.senate.gov/public/index.cfm/2016/9/u-s-forest-service-supports-protecting-the-methow-valley-from-mining>

“We thank Senator Cantwell for moving the Methow Headwaters legislation forward in the hearing, by making such a strong case for the legislation, and for obtaining the forest service’s support for action,” said Maggie Coon, a leader in the Methow Headwaters Campaign. “The Methow Valley is one of the state’s most special places. Its rural character, clean, cold waters and natural beauty supports an economy based on outdoor recreation, scenic tourism, agriculture, and fish and wildlife. The prospect of industrial-scale mining tears at the very qualities that make the Methow Valley a great place and its economy strong.

“We also appreciate the U.S. Forest Service’s support of the bill and look forward to the agency immediately initiating the withdrawal process in support of the exceptional legislative work of Sens. Murray and Cantwell, and in recognition of the overwhelming community support in the Methow Valley for action now,” Coon said.

In response to the hearing, Sen Murray posted, “I will keep working with my Senate colleagues to ensure this bill clears the next hurdle, because it is so important to protect ongoing investments in salmon recovery by federal, state, local, and tribal partners and the outdoor economy that the region depends on. I will keep working every possible avenue – including administrative action – to protect this special place.”

An administrative mineral withdrawal would prevent establishment of new mining claims for up to 20 years. According to the campaign the proposed withdrawal area encompasses the full extent of any copper deposits that might lead to an industrial-scale mine on the lands and protects critical streams and creeks that are at the heart of the Methow River’s headwaters.

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The Methow Headwaters Campaign brings together more than 135 local Methow Valley businesses, and a significant number of area residents, civic leaders and local, regional and national organizations concerned about the threat an industrial-scale copper mine poses to the region's economy, water resources and rural character.

The campaign is in response to plans by a Canadian company, Blue River Resources, Ltd., to pursue approval from the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest to conduct exploratory drilling at sites around Flagg Mountain, near the town of Mazama, Wash. The campaign says such drilling could be used to try to validate old mining claims and could open the door to future development of significant mining operations in the headwaters. The exploratory permit application is pending.

Nearly one million visitors come to the Methow Valley annually to enjoy the sun, snow, streams, wildlife and rural community, and they contribute more than \$150 million annually into Okanogan County's economy. The upper Methow is also critical to salmon recovery, and more than \$100 million has been invested in restoration and conservation efforts in the Methow Valley alone.

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About the Methow Valley and Headwaters

The Methow Headwaters are located in the midst of some of the Northwest's most spectacular and iconic lands, including the adjacent North Cascades National Park, the Pasayten and Chelan-Sawtooth Wilderness Areas and the North Cascades Scenic Highway. The Methow Valley is recognized by the National Forest Foundation as one of 14 treasured landscapes in which the organization is working with local communities to restore and build ecologically resilient landscapes. More information about the campaign is available at the campaign's website -- <http://www.methowheadwaters.org>.