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Methow Headwaters Mineral Withdrawal Process Initiated

Campaign Thanks Senators and Administration for Support and Action

Winthrop, Wash. -- The Methow Headwaters Campaign today thanked the Obama administration, the Department of Interior, and the U.S. Forest Service for efforts that led to a published notice in today's Federal Register proposing a mineral withdrawal for the Methow Headwaters in Washington State's Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest.

The campaign and its supporters also applauded Sens. Patty Murray (D-WA) and Maria Cantwell (D-WA) for their steadfast commitment to the Methow Valley and active leadership in supporting the withdrawal effort.

The notice proposes withdrawal of 340,000 acres of Methow Headwaters lands on the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest from new mineral exploration and development. The withdrawal will be in effect for two years while the agencies evaluate whether to extend the temporary withdrawal for 20 years. The Federal Register notice starts a 90-day public comment period.

In addition to the withdrawal, legislation to permanently protect the headwaters is also being pursued. The Methow Headwaters Protection Act of 2016 bill was introduced in May of 2016 by Sen. Murray and cosponsored by Sen. Cantwell.

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“The Methow Headwaters Campaign is overjoyed by the decision to initiate the withdrawal process, which we believe is critical to protecting the land and waters that support the Methow Valley’s economy and rural character,” said Maggie Coon, a leader in the campaign. “The withdrawal provides the time necessary to seek permanent protection for this special landscape and ensures that the valley’s economy and rural character are sustained.”

The campaign to protect the Methow headwaters officially launched in February 2016, in response to plans by a Canadian company, Blue River Resources, Ltd., to conduct exploratory drilling directly above the town of Mazama, Wash. Completion of exploratory drilling could open the door to future development of large scale, open pit mining operations in the headwaters.

The campaign to protect the area through a mineral withdrawal encompasses the full extent of any copper deposits that might lead to industrial-scale mining in headwater streams that originate at the heart of the Methow River’s headwaters. More than 135 diverse businesses, organizations and community groups, civic leaders, tribes, local town councils, and 2,000 individuals, signed on to support the campaign.

“The community in the Methow Valley is united in its desire to maintain the area’s rural character, and safeguard the lands and waters at the heart of the local economy,” said Sen. Linda Evans Parlette, R-Wenatchee. “I appreciate that the Department of Interior realizes the importance of the Methow Headwaters, and has initiated the withdrawal process in response to the community’s appeal.”

“We have supported the Methow Headwaters mineral withdrawal because the Methow is aboriginal territory for the Colville Tribes that must be maintained for future generations to enjoy and steward,” said Dr. Michael Marchand, Chairman of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation. “The protection that a mineral withdrawal offers these lands will complement the Colville Tribes’ longstanding and ongoing efforts to restore critical habitat in the Methow with federal, state, and local partners.”

Nearly one million visitors come to the Methow Valley annually to enjoy the sun, snow, streams, wildlife and rural community, and they bring 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. Additionally, fragile and interconnected streams support recreation, agriculture, ranching and wildlife throughout Okanogan County.

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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. It is located in the midst of some of the Northwest's most spectacular and iconic lands, including the adjacent North Cascades National Park, Pasayten Wilderness and the North Cascades Scenic Highway, which looks toward the proposed mine site as travelers enter the valley from the west.

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Federal Register Notice: <https://federalregister.gov/d/2016-31746>

Methow Headwaters Campaign: <https://www.methowheadwaters.org>