

U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON

ENERGY & NATURAL RESOURCES

SENATOR MARIA CANTWELL, *Ranking Member*



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Opening Statement Senator Maria Cantwell (D-Wash.) Hearing to Consider Public Lands Bills September 22, 2016

“Thank you, Madam Chairman. I know we have a lengthy agenda for today, including several proposals that have been the subject of intense debate for many years. But, many of the 21 bills on the agenda are much less controversial and I hope we will be able to work with our colleagues to try and find ways to move forward on these proposals.

“I would like to discuss a few of these bills. First of all, thank you for including S. 2991, a bill Sen. Murray and I introduced, which would protect the headwaters of the Methow River in the North Cascades region of our state by withdrawing national forest lands from mining.

“I’m proud to work with Sen. Murray to protect the headwaters of the Methow Valley. Gov. Inslee, area tribes, local elected officials, business owners and residents are all on the same page in wanting to protect this area.

“Our bill would withdraw from future mining, subject to valid existing rights, 340,000 acres of national forest lands that are prime habitat for salmon, spotted owl, lynx and grizzly bear.

“This bill is about two things: clean water and keeping an amazing place the way it is.

“Federal, state, local and private investments have funded \$100 million of salmon and other fish and wildlife restoration work in the Methow Valley. No one wants to put that investment at risk. A copper mine that has been proposed near the town of Mazama would jeopardize that.

“More than a million tourists come to the valley every year and contribute \$150 million to the local economy. That would also be jeopardized by a mine.

“So, it would threaten the identity of the valley. This area has had lots of discussions over the last 40 years about its future. It turned down the idea of being a destination ski resort so the rural nature of the area could continue.

“Since then, the valley has been working on being a mecca for outdoor recreation, including Nordic skiing, climbing, hunting and backpacking. This is not the place to develop a copper mine. And yet it is also a stark reminder that the Mining Law of 1872 is wildly outdated.



“While this bill would permanently withdraw the Methow Headwaters from mining, the Forest Service and the Department of the Interior have administrative authority to temporarily withdraw this land from mineral development while this bill is being considered in Congress.

“I strongly urge the agencies to use their authority to immediately protect these headwaters in this particular area.

“A handful of the bills on the agenda today are controversial. For the record, I strongly oppose any bill that would prohibit or restrict the president’s ability to designate national monuments using the Antiquities Act.

“Similarly, I have fought for many years to protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the Tongass National Forest and other important conservation lands in Alaska—lands which are important to all Americans.

“But, I would like to focus on a couple of areas of bipartisan support. I strongly support bills that have been introduced and which I have cosponsored, and which the chair mentioned, to establish a National Volcano Early Warning and Monitoring System to help warn the public against avoidable harm from volcanic activity.

“I know for some of our colleagues, Madam Chair, seem like something that is distant and far away. But, I guarantee you, since these volcanoes are up down the coast of the Pacific Northwest, it impacts us by not having information that detects whether these volcanoes could cause immediate impacts. We need the science to help guide us here. So having the information is critical. This is very important to Alaska and Washington, and I look forward to working together.

“Many of our colleagues have bills on the agenda that reflect important priorities for their states. I look forward to working with you and our colleagues to find areas of agreement on these important legislative bills. And since we have so many of them on the agenda, I’m going to end my remarks there. Thank you again for the hearing.

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