

World Editorial Board | Protect the headwaters

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Commentary

U.S. Rep. Dan Newhouse sent a letter to Secretary of Agriculture Sonny Perdue and Secretary of Interior Ryan Zinke last week expressing support for protecting the upper Methow Valley from industrial mining operations, and asking the agencies to get a move on with their environmental review process.

Newhouse's letter is just the latest push by our congressional delegation to protect some 340,000 acres of National Forest in the Methow Valley from development of a large-scale copper mine.

In 2014, a Canadian mining company filed with the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest for exploratory drilling permits, with the intent of eventually developing a full-scale copper mine on Flagg Mountain, overlooking Mazama. In response, dozens of business owners and civic leaders organized the Methow Headwaters Campaign to stop the effort, which helped convince land managers to issue a two-year freeze on mining proposals while they considered longer term protections. Now the federal government is considering a 20-year mineral withdrawal, which is government-speak for a ban on mining.

"There has been near unanimous and bipartisan support in the Valley for the Methow Headwaters mineral withdrawal," Newhouse wrote to Perdue and Zinke. "From the local Chamber of Commerce and more than 135 businesses to tribal nations, hunters and anglers, sportsmen groups, farmers, and current and former state and local elected officials, this proposal has gained broad-based support."

For their part, Senators Maria Cantwell and Patty Murray have repeatedly introduced legislation that would provide for a permanent mineral withdrawal.

Nearly one million visitors come to the Methow Valley each year, drawn to the place by its extraordinary natural beauty. Tourism and outdoor recreation contribute more than \$150 million annually to Okanogan County's economy. An industrial-scale copper mine threatens all of that.

We appreciate the efforts of Rep. Newhouse and Sens. Cantwell and Murray on this issue, and we urge the Trump administration to preserve the quality of life and economic vitality of one of the region's most treasured landscapes.

This is the opinion of The Wenatchee World Editorial Board: Publisher Rufus Woods, Managing Editor Cal FitzSimmons, Features Editor Marco Martinez and Editorial Page Editor Kelli Scott.
