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## **Community Shows Strong Support for Protecting Methow Headwaters** **Forest Service Recommendation for 20-Year Mineral Withdrawal Endorsed**

**WINTHROP, WA** – More than 400 community members packed a public meeting in Winthrop Tuesday night to endorse protecting the area’s waters, communities and economy by placing the headwaters of the Methow Valley off-limits to industrial-scale mining for the next 20 years.

The meeting, which was hosted by the Bureau of Land Management, offered attendees an overview of the withdrawal proposal and process, and a chance to share their views with the agency. A final public comment period for the withdrawal also closed on Tuesday.

“The meeting turnout was incredible and shows the community’s tremendous commitment to ensuring the future of this amazing valley,” said Maggie Coon of the Methow Headwaters Campaign. “People realize that the Methow Valley is a special place and the headwaters are critical to supporting tourism, outdoor recreation, farming, ranching, and the service businesses that drive our local economy.”

In September, the U.S. Forest Service recommended to the BLM a 20-year mineral withdrawal of the Methow headwaters. The withdrawal covers about 340,000 acres of land on the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest. Mineral withdrawals protect selected lands and waters from large-scale mining while continuing to allow existing uses. The 20-year withdrawal also provides Congress time to consider legislation to permanently protect the headwaters. Such legislation, the Methow Headwaters Protection Act, is currently pending.

The Winthrop public meeting completes the required tasks of the withdrawal process, allowing the agencies to move forward on a final decision. The withdrawal process began in December of 2016 when the Department of Interior formally “segregated” the headwaters from new mining exploration or development, and embarked on a two-year process to evaluate the 20-year withdrawal.

Community concerns were raised in 2014 by a proposal to explore developing a copper mine in the headwaters, resulting in the launch of the Methow Headwaters Campaign in 2016. The campaign brought the community together to advocate protection of the headwaters through the mineral withdrawal. The withdrawal enjoys the endorsement of more than 150 local businesses, the support of the town councils of Twisp and Winthrop, and the Winthrop Chamber of Commerce. Others backing the withdrawal include: angling organizations, hunters, backcountry horsemen, farmers, outdoor recreational groups and enthusiasts, tribal nations, civic leaders, and local organizations and individuals.

“The Methow Valley and its headwaters provide habitat for a large number of animals, including a significant mule deer population that attracts hunters from around the region.” said Carmen Vanbianchi, a member of the Washington State Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers. “We see protecting this habitat as good for wildlife and for those of us who enjoy hunting and fishing, and as furthering the important contributions sportsmen and women make to our local economy.”

Support for the withdrawal has been strongly bipartisan, including the active support and leadership of Congressman Dan Newhouse, and both U.S. Senators, Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell. Current and former members of the Washington state legislature, and other local elected officials also have supported the withdrawal.

Nearly one million visitors come to the Methow Valley annually to enjoy the sun, snow, streams, wildlife and rural community, and they add 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, the valley’s network of interconnected streams support recreation, agriculture, ranching and wildlife throughout Okanogan County.

“The community has made an excellent case for this withdrawal, and we encourage the BLM and Department of Interior to prioritize acting on the proposal before year’s end,” said Twisp Mayor Soo Ing-Moody. “It is exciting that so many people came to the public meeting to share why they believe our headwaters are crucial to supporting fish, agriculture, our economy and the water needs of our towns, now and in the future.”

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