



OKANOGAN COUNTY

Board of Commissioners

Chris Branch
Commissioner District 1
Andy Hover
Commissioner District 2
Jim DeTro
Commissioner District 3
Laleña Johns
Clerk of the Board

November 19, 2018

The Honorable Ryan Zinke
Secretary of Interior
U.S. Department of Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Zinke:

We are writing as a united Board of County Commissioners for Okanogan County, to express our support for the mineral withdrawal in the Methow Headwaters. The Methow Valley is an important and vital contributor to the economy of Okanogan County. The clean waters that flow from the headwaters down to the Columbia River are critical to farming and ranching and for feeding the aquifer that communities throughout the valley depend upon. The public lands and wide-open spaces of the valley are also home to important, diverse wildlife populations and provide recreational and scenic qualities that attract visitors and second homeowners to the valley, as well as support the livelihoods of a large number of full-time residents. I request that your agency heed the U.S. Forest Service's recommendation for a 20-year mineral withdrawal for the 340,079-acre region and complete all necessary approvals by the end of the two-year segregation period (by December 30, 2018).

On November 13th the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) held a public meeting in the Methow Valley. Nearly 450 people came out to express public input on the proposal. The comments the BLM received were in overwhelming support of the mineral withdrawal and touched on a wide range of important community issues including: water, wildlife, fish, agriculture, recreation, economic health and Native American values. There has been near unanimous and bipartisan support for the Methow Headwaters mineral withdrawal. From local town councils, the Chamber of Commerce, more than 135 businesses, tribal nations, sportsmen groups, farmers, and current and former state elected officials, this proposal has gained broad-based support at the local, regional and national level. In a county that embraces resource development and has a long history of mining, it is widely recognized that this specific proposal for the Methow Valley has merit.

The proposed withdrawal is entirely consistent with Department of Interior (DOI) and Department of Agriculture (USDA) initiatives to create a conservation legacy, promote agriculture and rural prosperity, and be a good neighbor. Furthermore, the withdrawal supports the objectives of *Secretarial Order 3362: Improving Habitat Quality in Western Big-Game Winter Range and Migration Corridors* in its efforts to enhance and improve the quality of big-game winter range and migration corridor habitat. The Methow Valley and the headwaters region is home to the state's largest migratory mule deer herd, and approximately 80 percent of the herd moves through or resides in the proposed withdrawal area. With some years providing one million recreational days for deer hunting statewide, this herd brings significant economic stimulus to the region and contributes to the \$150-million-dollar recreation economy in Okanogan County.

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The Board of County Commissioners for Okanogan County is wholeheartedly in support of a 20-year mineral withdrawal for the Methow Headwaters and in doing so supports the desires of the county we represent, the continued growth of the regional economy, and the protection of precious water supplies that are the region's most important resource. We appreciated the opportunity to deliver overwhelming public support for the mineral withdrawal at the BLM public meeting on November 13th. We are pleased that the U.S. Forest Service has completed the Environmental Assessment and issued a final recommendation for a 20-year mineral withdrawal for the entirety of the Methow Headwaters region and now ask that your agency weigh the agency's recommendation and the public support for the Methow Headwaters mineral withdrawal, and approve the Methow Headwaters proposal before December 30th, 2018. Thank you for your leadership on this issue.

Sincerely,

BOARD OF OKANOGAN COUNTY COMMISSIONERS



Jim DeTro, Chairman



Chris Branch, Member



Andy Hover, Member