



December 31, 2018

**Contact:**

**Maggie Coon**  
**Methow Headwaters Campaign**  
**509.997.2669 (primary)**  
**509.341.9124 (mobile)**  
[info@methowheadwaters.org](mailto:info@methowheadwaters.org)

**Community to Continue Efforts to Protect Methow Headwaters**  
Calls on Interior to Act on Withdrawal

**Winthrop, Wash.** -- The Methow Headwaters Campaign and supporters today expressed their dismay that the Department of Interior failed to act prior to year's end on a proposed 20-year mineral withdrawal for 340,079 acres of land in the Methow Valley's headwaters. The area is an iconic outdoor landscape in the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest in North Central Washington State that drives a local economy based on recreation, agriculture and tourism.

"Last month more than 400 area residents turned out for a community meeting with the Bureau of Land Management to endorse making these critical lands off-limits to large-scale mining. This is vitally important to our community, and we will keep working to protect the headwaters," said Maggie Coon of the Methow Headwaters Campaign. "That the Department of Interior has not acted on the withdrawal means we will also redouble our effort to seek protection through legislation."

In a statement, U.S. Rep. Dan Newhouse (R-WA) said: "I am disappointed the Department of Interior did not complete its work to finalize a 20-year moratorium on mining in the Methow Headwaters by the December 30th deadline. This proposal was approved by the U.S. Forest Service and is overwhelmingly supported by constituents across North Central Washington. As we enter a new year and a new Congress, I am determined to pursue the options available—including legislative routes—to push this effort across the finish line and protect the Methow Headwaters."

A bill, the *Methow Headwaters Protection Act* has been pending in Congress. It was introduced by Senators Maria Cantwell (D-WA) and Patty Murray (D-WA) in 2016 and again in 2017. The Methow Headwaters Campaign vowed to continue efforts to work with legislative champions to seek protection in the new Congress, noting its appreciation of the significant ongoing support of Senators Cantwell and Murray.

“The Methow community is unified in the need for the withdrawal to protect our waters, wildlife, communities and local economy,” said Coon. “We are very disappointed that the two-year segregation period has concluded without action. It is particularly frustrating given the hard work that has been undertaken by citizens and land managers. While we recognize the government shutdown has affected many agencies, including Interior, we ask the department’s leadership to finalize the withdrawal as soon as possible to help support the future of our communities, wildlife and economy.”

New claims, exploration and mine development in the Methow headwaters were suspended through a process known as “segregation,” for two years in December of 2016 by order of the Secretary of Interior. Since that time an assessment of the 20-year mineral withdrawal has been in process. The U.S. Forest Service completed an environmental assessment of the withdrawal in September and supported the 20-year withdrawal. Withdrawals provide Congress time to consider legislation, while continuing to ensure protection of the ecological and recreational resources of lands such as the Methow headwaters.

“The effort to protect the headwaters brought our community together,” said Soo Ing-Moody, mayor of Twisp. “Support has been broad-based and bipartisan in a way that few issues are these days. There are many, many people to thank for supporting the 20-year withdrawal, including the commitment of Representative Dan Newhouse (R-WA) and his staff. From his first visit to the Methow Valley to discuss the withdrawal, throughout the process, Congressman Newhouse worked very hard to support our community. His engagement, along with the support of numerous other elected leaders, makes a very compelling case for the withdrawal.”

The withdrawal area covers the full extent of potential copper deposits in the headwaters and the habitat and migration corridors that would be affected by mining in the area. The headwaters provide migration and stopover areas that support Washington State’s largest mule deer herd, about 80% of which migrate through or reside on the lands. Hunting is an important activity in the Methow Valley and makes a significant contribution to local economies across Eastern Washington. A broad array of fish, birds and other important wildlife also reside in the headwaters.

A 2014 proposal to explore developing a copper mine in the headwaters raised significant community concerns, resulting in the launch of the Methow Headwaters Campaign in 2016. The campaign brought the community together to advocate for protection of the headwaters through the mineral withdrawal. The withdrawal enjoyed the endorsement of more than 150 local businesses, the support of the town councils of Twisp and Winthrop, the Winthrop Chamber of Commerce and the Okanogan Board of County Commissioners. 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.

“Local businesses got involved very early on in this effort because we recognized that our success is related to the vitality of the natural lands and waters in the Methow Valley and its headwaters,” said Julie Muyliaert, co-owner of Methow Cycle & Sport. “People come from near and far to enjoy our incredible landscape and amenities, and it’s critical to our future as a business and to our community that our headwaters are protected.”

The headwaters supply critical water to the Methow Valley and the Methow River, which is part of the Upper Columbia River Basin. The river supports general recreation, fish habitat, and water for farms, orchards, ranching and residents. The valley's groundwater is recharged from the headwaters, which makes protecting the quality of the local water supply a vital need. 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.

The area is known for its world-class, year-round recreational opportunities. These include alpine and rock climbing, backcountry skiing, hunting and fishing, wildlife viewing, mountain biking and more. The valley is home to North America’s largest groomed cross-country ski trail system.

Strong community support for the withdrawal recognizes the Methow Valley as a special place with an economy tied to the quality of the surrounding lands. The economic contribution of all recreational lands to Okanogan County is more than \$150 million and recreation contributes more than 1,800 jobs. Recreation spending benefits food and beverage, lodging, retail, and other service sectors.

###

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