

# OKANOGAN TRAILS CHAPTER



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

November 28, 2018

*Re: Support the 20-year Methow Headwaters Mineral Withdrawal*

To Secretary Zinke,

Okanogan Trails Mule Deer Foundation Chapter is writing in strong support of the recommendation of the U.S. Forest Service for a 20-year mineral withdrawal of 340,079 acres of U.S. Forest Service land in the Methow Headwaters of Washington State. We urge the agency to move quickly to approve the 20-year withdrawal so that these lands are declared off-limits to any new mining activities while Congress works on a permanent solution for protecting the valley's ecological and recreational resources.

The Mule Deer Foundation (MDF) is a conservation organization dedicated to ensuring high quality mule deer populations in North America. We are dedicated to raising and using funds to restore, improve and protect mule deer habitat resulting in self-sustaining, healthy, free ranging and huntable deer populations and to encourage and support responsible wildlife management with government agencies, private organizations and landowners.

This mineral withdrawal will support those objectives with a simple signature. So many of our efforts take thousands of volunteer hours, millions of dollars and huge efforts and we can only wait for the results and hope for better mule deer populations or habitat. This just takes a signature to allow the withdrawal, and the biggest mule deer herd in our state will have its main migration path protected. Support for the withdrawal is significant and bipartisan. That so many interests have unified in support of the withdrawal signals the importance of protecting the unique values of the Methow Valley, locally and state-wide. Business owners, hunters, fishers, environmentalists, conservationists, ranchers, all legislators, and all three of our county commissioners are in full support of the withdrawal.

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.

Our local chapter consists of volunteers dedicated to protecting mule deer and their habitat in our communities. The Methow is "the place" to go for the best mule deer hunting in Washington. The latest Department of Wildlife deer collaring data shows very clearly that our mule deer migrate directly through and use the whole area being considered for the withdrawal. Research also shows the most disruptive thing for mule deer migration are roads, which would be built to explore and or extract any minerals from this area.

In addition, the vital lands and water resources of the region are gravely threatened by the development of a large-scale mining. A mineral withdrawal of the Methow Headwaters is essential to the valley and the greater region as it safeguards the resources and values that underpin the local economy and allow this rural community to thrive. More than a million visitors a year come here to hike, mountain bike, snowmobile, ski, climb, wildlife watch and hunt and fish.

We appreciate the work of the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and Department of Interior in forwarding the Methow Headwaters withdrawal. Thank you for hearing our voices, and supporting the local jobs and economy that are dependent on the protection of this special place. We fully support approving the proposed withdrawal by December 30, 2018, when the current two-year segregation period ends. The withdrawal will ensure these important lands are protected for mule deer migration for current and future generations.

Jay Kehne  
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