Organizational Comment Letter

Washington Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
The Sportsmen's voice for our wild public lands, waters and wildlife.

November 8, 2018

Bureau of Land Management
Oregon State Office,
P.O. Box 2965
Portland, OR 97208-2965
Attention: Methow Headwaters Mineral Withdrawal

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

To BLM Leadership and Secretary Zinke,

The Washington Chapter of Backcountry Hunters and Anglers 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.

Backcountry Hunters & Anglers is the fastest growing organization representing sportsmen and women in North America and our interest in protecting the upper Methow Valley is of both local and national importance to sportsmen and women. The unique watershed and ecosystem of the upper Methow Valley is home to high-quality fish and wildlife habitat, supporting robust populations of cutthroat trout and mule deer. The mining in this area would fragment an important migration corridor and interfere with the seasonal movement of Washington's largest mule deer population, which migrate from the high country of the Pasayten Wilderness to wintering range in the lower valley. Hunters from across the Pacific Northwest travel to the area each fall to pursue these deer, providing a significant economic boost to local communities. The recovery of Upper Columbia Chinook salmon and the health of coldwater fisheries supporting highly sought-after species such as anadromous steelhead also rely on the clean, connected waters of the upper Methow River and its tributaries for spawning habitat and thermal refuge.

The Methow also boasts a vibrant community with strong agriculture and tourism sectors, drawing visitors from around the region and sending Washington apples around the world. The impact of industrial-scale mining to Washington's economy is another negative factor to consider. More than 70 percent of the local economy depends on the clean water of the Methow River for outdoor recreation activities, which generates $150 million annually in consumer spending. This revenue helps fuel our nation's $887-billion outdoor economy that employs 7.6 million Americans. Nearly 200,000 jobs are supported in Washington State as a result of outdoor

recreation spending, with total economic contributions to the state economy amounting to $20.5 billion annually. The hunting and fishing industry alone employs close to 500,000 Americans — this is 300,000 more jobs available compared to the energy development industry

If industrial-scale mining in the upper Methow Valley is allowed to move forward, fish and wildlife habitat stands to lose greatly and access to quality public lands and waters would diminish greatly for America's sportsmen and women in addition to threatening the vibrant local economy that relies on outdoor recreation like hunting and fishing. We encourage you to support and advance a 20-year mineral withdrawal in the Methow Headwaters to conserve a critical landscape that is vital to Washington's rural economies. North America's wild public lands, waters, and wildlife depend on it.

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 and waters continue to support the people and economy of the Methow Valley for current and future generations.

Sincerely,

Max A.Cole
West Side Co-Chair
Washington Chapter Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

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East Side Co-Chair
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