



March 30, 2017

Re: [S.566](#), a bill to withdraw certain land in Okanogan County, Washington, to protect the land, and for other purposes. (Ms. Cantwell)

Trout Unlimited strongly supports S. 566, the Methow Headwaters Protection Act of 2017, which protects specific lands within the Okanogan-Wenatchee National Forest from mining development.

The Methow River, which flows from its headwaters on Flagg Mountain to meet the Columbia 80 miles later, is one of Washington State's most iconic rivers and serves as a Pacific Northwest mecca for hunters, anglers, recreationists, and conservationists.

The Methow provides key habitat for a myriad of native fish species, including three species of Endangered Species Act (ESA)-listed salmonid species: Upper Columbia spring Chinook, Upper Columbia steelhead trout, and bull trout. The salmon and steelhead that return to this river must navigate past 9 dams and endure countless impacts through an over-stressed ecosystem in order to reach their spawning grounds. Trout Unlimited's Western Water and Habitat Program has invested millions of dollars and thousands of staff hours to work hand-in-hand with the community on projects to improve trout and salmon habitat throughout the Methow River watershed. On a larger scale, the Federal government has also invested hundreds of millions to repair and restore these populations— both in the Methow, and throughout the Columbia Basin. Protecting the Methow headwaters will safeguard these investments prevent the unavoidable damage to water resources associated with large-scale mining on Flagg Mountain.

The Methow Valley has built its economic success upon two main industries: Agriculture and Recreation - both of which rely heavily on healthy waters. A large-scale mine in the headwaters of the Methow River watershed would (1) pose an unacceptable risk to ESA-listed fish species that are already on the brink of extinction, (2) undermine millions in taxpayer dollars spent on fisheries recovery in this watershed, and (3) devastate the local recreation-based economy, which relies on sustained ecosystem health (and fisheries) in the Methow River watershed.

The campaign to withdrawal the Upper Methow from mineral entry has amassed an impressive coalition – a large and diverse group partners, including over 100 local businesses and organizations, tribes, local and state elected officials, and numerous sportsmen and recreational organizations. The prospect of an industrial-scale mine on Flagg Mountain or anywhere else in the Upper Methow Valley represents a direct threat to the very values at the heart of success in the community and the quarter-billion-dollar investment private landowners, tribes, and state and federal agencies have made in conservation, restoration, and recreation efforts over the years.

Simply put, industrial-scale mining would threaten all that is special about the Methow and devastate its local economy, natural environment, and quality of life. On behalf of our more than 150,000 members across the country—including the more than 4,700 who reside in the state of Washington—we sincerely thank Senators Murray and Cantwell for introducing this bill.

For questions related to these comments, please contact the following:

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