

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-4705

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March 18, 2016

Mr. Thomas Tidwell, Chief  
United States Forest Service  
1400 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20250-1111

Dear Chief Tidwell:

I am writing to express my concern regarding the proposed Goat Mountain Project, which would allow for exploratory drilling to collect hardrock samples, including copper, gold, molybdenum, and silver, adjacent to Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument. The Bureau of Land Management requires the consent of the Forest Service before issuing permits for exploratory drilling on National Forest System lands, and I urge you not to provide that consent for the proposed Goat Mountain Project. We discussed this briefly during last week's oversight hearing on the FY2017 Forest Service budget request, but I also wanted to submit my views formally as part of the agencies' comment period for this project.

I understand the proposed exploratory drilling would take place in the Green River Valley, just outside of the iconic Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument. The Green River valley is a very popular recreation destination for hunting, fishing, backcountry horse riding, hiking, and camping due to its scenic beauty, healthy fish and wildlife populations, and proximity to the Monument. In addition, the Green River has been found by the Forest Service to be eligible for designation as a Wild and Scenic River and has been designated by the state of Washington as a Wild Steelhead Gene Bank. The Green River is also an important human resource, as it flows into the Cowlitz River, which supplies municipal drinking water for the thousands of people that live in downstream communities. Mineral exploration and development would interfere with the outdoor recreation and conservation purposes for which these lands were acquired.

The Forest Service purchased the land on which the Goat Mountain Project is proposed in 1986 with funding from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). As such, mineral development can only be authorized by the Secretary of the Interior when she is advised by the Secretary of Agriculture that "such development will not interfere with the primary purposes for which the land was acquired and only in accordance with such conditions as may be specified by the Secretary of Agriculture in order to protect such purposes." 5 U.S.C. App. 1, § 402.

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The Land and Water Conservation Fund Act (54 U.S.C. 200306) requires that the acquisition be primarily for outdoor recreation or conservation purposes. Indeed, before purchasing this land, the Forest Service sent a letter to Washington's Congressional delegation stating that the Forest Service's acquisition of the property would be to "aid in the preservation of the integrity of the Green River prior to its entering the National Volcanic Monument, and will also aid in the preservation of the scenic beauty of this area which is to become an important Monument portal."

Consenting to hardrock mining, including exploratory drilling, on lands purchased for conservation and recreation purposes is not sound public policy. The uses are inconsistent. Moreover, the commercial extraction of non-renewable natural resources seems completely at odds with the core principle of the Land and Water Conservation Fund. The LWCF is a program that Congress has continued to authorize for over 50 years, dedicating a percentage of the revenues the Federal government receives for developing our non-renewable resources off-shore and using those funds to conserve areas of lasting benefit to the American people. Condoning exploratory drilling and hardrock mining on LWCF-acquired lands would set a terrible precedent and jeopardize national treasures that were offered to the Forest Service by willing sellers so that the land could be conserved and enjoyed by the public.

Given the incompatibility of this project with the primary purposes for which the lands were acquired and the broader negative LWCF implications, I respectfully request that you refrain from providing consent for prospecting permits for the Goat Mountain Project.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator



CC:

Jamie E. Connell, Acting State Director, Bureau of Land Management  
Gina Owens, Forest Supervisor, Gifford Pinchot National Forest