
North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board

September 24, 2015

Mr. Jerome E. Perez, Oregon State Director
Bureau of Land Management
Oregon State Office
P.O. Box 2965
Portland, OR 97208-2965

Dear Mr. Perez,

Subject: Comments in Support of the Notice of Proposed Withdrawal of
Mineral Rights in Southern Oregon

The North Coast Regional Water Quality Control Board (Regional Water Board) would like to thank you for this opportunity to comment in support of the proposed withdrawal of approximately 100,000 acres of National Forest and Bureau of Land Management land located in Southwest Oregon from use under federal mining laws. Our primary concerns rest in the headwaters of the North Fork Smith River, an interstate water of the United States that flows from Oregon through California.

The Smith River is a unique and thriving natural resource of high-quality water, often referred to as the crown jewel of the North Coast Region of California. Its unspoiled ecological and recreational value is further enhanced by also being the water supply for several communities including Gasquet, Hiouchi and Crescent City. It is a state and federally designated Wild and Scenic River with world class recreational opportunities and a habitat stronghold for a declining population of rare, threaten and endangered anadromous fish. The active recreational and commercial fishing industries supported by the Smith River make it a vital part of the Northern California environment, economy, and culture. A mining project in the headwaters of the North Fork of the Smith River has a high risk of resulting in significant discharges of waste and adverse impacts to water quality and beneficial uses.

To add further protection to the Smith River, in March 2015 as part of the Triennial Review of the *Water Quality Control Plan for the North Coast Region* (Basin Plan), the Regional Water Board directed staff to develop a proposed amendment to the Basin Plan to designate Outstanding National Resource Waters (ONRWs) with initial focus on the Smith

River. An ORNW designation for the Smith River in California would significantly restrict authorization of discharges with the potential to degrade such waters.

For these reasons, the Regional Water Board strongly supports the proposed interim withdrawal of mineral rights in the North Fork Smith River. Further, we would support consideration of future legislation to permanently remove these areas from potential mining. Such an action would augment our proposed action to designate the Smith River in California as an ORNW.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this letter, feel free to contact Jeremiah J. Puget, Environmental Scientist of my staff, at (707) 576-2835 or at Jeremiah.Puget@waterboards.ca.gov.

Sincerely,

Shin-Roei Lee
Assistant Executive Officer

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cc:

Oregon Governor John Kitzhaber, 160 State Capitol, 900 Court Street NE,
Salem, OR 97301

California Governor Edmund G. Brown Jr., c/o State Capitol, Suite 1173,
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Senator Jeff Merkley, 495 State Street, Suite 330, Salem, OR 97301

Representative Peter DeFazio, 125 Central Avenue, Suite 350, Coos Bay, OR 97420

Representative Jared Huffman, 999 Fifth Avenue, Suite 290, San Rafael, CA 94901

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Michael Van Hattem, California Department of Fish and Wildlife

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