



December 22, 2017

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue SW
Room 200-A
Washington, DC 20250

The Honorable Ryan K. Zinke
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Mail Stop 7329
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretaries Perdue and Zinke:

Trout Unlimited is the nation's largest coldwater fisheries conservation nonprofit organization with over 300,000 members and supporters across the country. We, the undersigned, represent more than 41,000 western state TU members of Trout Unlimited who value access to pristine public lands and the ability to hunt and fish on those lands as cherished features of living in the American West. We are also pragmatic, and recognize the need for resource development and the benefits that come from mineral extraction on public lands to support modern technologies and our way of life.

On September 28, 2017, your offices both received a letter from Representative Rob Bishop urging a comprehensive review of all mineral withdrawals that occurred over the past eight years. That letter drew specific attention to the 100,000 acre Southwest Oregon Mineral Withdrawal which went into effect on December 30, 2016. Representative Bishop's letter did not mention the exceptional value of the rivers and watersheds that were protected under the Southwest Oregon Mineral Withdrawal and omitted reference to the overwhelming local support the proposal received throughout the public comment period. Because of the high value to fish and wildlife of the area, and the unprecedented local support for this withdrawal, we are compelled to respond to Representative Bishop's letter and to urge you to maintain the Southwest Oregon Mineral Withdrawal.

We know the high value that you place on hunting and fishing. As hunters and anglers, we think of Southwest Oregon as a place defined by rugged country and untamed rivers where we can go to find solitude, dramatic landscapes, and some of the best habitat for big game and wild anadromous fish in the lower 48 states. Rivers like the Rogue, Smith, Illinois, and Chetco are legendary amongst sportsmen and women for their strong runs of steelhead, sea-run cutthroat, chinook, and coho. Big game hunters pursue Roosevelt elk, blacktail deer, and black bear in coastal country that is as steep and rocky as it is beautiful.

The greatest threat to the pristine beauty and healthy habitats of this area is the potential for strip mining of ancient soils known as nickel laterites. The area has been subject to mineral exploration in the past, but the small low-grade deposits have, so far, made mining uneconomical. Driven by a spike in nickel prices, between 2007 and 2010 thousands of acres of new mining claims were located in two areas, and three mining plans of operation have been submitted to the Forest Service. While some mining companies in

A mission to conserve, protect, & restore North America's coldwater fisheries and their watersheds.

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the U.S. have done much to reduce their natural resource risks, we view strip mining in this region -- known for extremely high precipitation of over 100 inches a year—as incompatible with conserving the region’s exceptional natural assets. Such threats are simply too great in an area with such pristine and fragile watersheds as those found in the Kalmiopsis Wilderness. This area needs to be protected from mineral exploration and the Southwest Oregon Mineral Withdrawal is a step towards that protection.

Representative Bishop’s letter characterized the Southwest Oregon Mineral Withdrawal as an executive overreach, committed in the waning days of a lame duck presidency. That characterization ignores the significant public outreach and engagement and the overwhelming local support for this protection. In fact, in the Kalmiopsis, local voices led the charge for protection against mining in the withdrawn area.

We are not opposed to mining, however, in the case of the Southwest Oregon Mineral Withdrawal and the pristine rivers and watersheds of the Kalmiopsis Wilderness, the mineral withdrawal provides an essential tool to protect this area from the permanent damage that could occur from surface nickel mining and other mineral exploration. When executed with the intent of preserving and protecting coldwater fisheries resources and the watersheds that support them, through the appropriate channels, and with broad public support, as was done with the Southwest Oregon Mineral Withdrawal, we support such action. We urge you to consider these important values and allow the Southwest Oregon Mineral Withdrawal, and others like it, to remain in place.

Respectfully,

Chris Wood
President and CEO
Trout Unlimited

Terry Turner
Oregon Council Chair

Cindy Noble
California Council Chair