

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: February 9, 2018

CONTACTS:

Nicole Budine, Policy and Campaign Manager, Cascade Forest Conservancy, 607-735-3753

Matt Little, Executive Director, Cascade Forest Conservancy, 541-678-2322

Tom Buchele, Managing Attorney, Earthrise Law Center, 503-768-6736

Anastasia Greene, Regional Communications Manager, The Wilderness Society, 540-207-3162

## **Forest Service Approves Drilling Near Mount St. Helens**

*Conservation and Recreation Groups Oppose Due to  
Impacts on Fish, Water Quality and Recreation.*

Portland, OR – On February 8, 2018, the Forest Service issued a final decision consenting to exploratory drilling in the Green River valley, just outside the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument. A coalition of over 20 conservation and recreation groups opposes the project, claiming mining exploration and development will destroy recreational opportunities in the area, significantly harm wild steelhead populations in the Green River, and pollute the water supply of downstream communities.

“Tens of thousands of people have expressed opposition to this proposal due to its impacts on recreation, clean water, and native fish, in and around one of our most treasured National Monuments. Yet the agencies continue to advance this dangerous proposal,” said **Matt Little, Executive Director of the Cascade Forest Conservancy**. “Allowing mining activities in a pristine river valley alongside an active volcano is simply ludicrous. We will do all we can to stop it.”

Drilling permits would allow a Canadian mining company, Ascot Resources Ltd., to drill 63 drill holes from 21 drill pads to locate deposits of copper, gold, and molybdenum. The project would include extensive industrial mining operations 24/7 throughout the summer months on roughly 900 acres of public lands in the Green River valley, just outside the northeast border of the Monument. The prospecting permits allow for constant drilling operations, the installation of drilling-related structures and facilities, the reconstruction of 1.69 miles of decommissioned roads, and pumping up to 5,000 gallons of groundwater per day.

Some parcels of land in question were acquired to promote recreation and conservation under the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act (LWCFA). In a previous lawsuit filed by the Cascade

Forest Conservancy (then the Gifford Pinchot Task Force), a federal judge invalidated Ascot's drilling permits and held that the agencies violated the LWCFCA by failing to recognize that mining development cannot interfere with the outdoor recreational purposes for which the land was acquired. The decision by the BLM and Forest Service to once again issue Ascot drilling permits follows the release of a modified EA in 2017, prepared in response to this prior court decision.

“This project would severely impact recreation opportunities due to noise, dust, exhaust fumes, lights, vehicle traffic, the presence of drill equipment, and project area closures,” said **Tom Buchele, Managing Attorney of the Earthrise Law Center**. “I cannot fathom how the Forest Service could legally conclude that drilling would not interfere with recreation without violating the LWCFCA.”

The pristine Green River flows through the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument, passing through old growth as well as a unique post-eruption environment that provides habitat for a variety of native fish and wildlife. The Green River flows into the North Fork Toutle River and Cowlitz River, which provides drinking water to thousands of people in downstream communities. The city of Kelso recently passed a resolution against the mine because of impacts from leaking mine effluent and failed toxic tailings ponds that would result from locating a mine in an active volcanic zone. “Last October I was fortunate enough to visit the Green River valley,” said **Gloria Nichols, resident of Kelso, WA**. “This area is a gift that provides my community with water. It is absolutely beautiful and should not be destroyed for future generations by mining.”

“Mount St. Helens is no place for a mine,” said **Tom Uniack, Executive Director for Washington Wild**. “The greater economic and social value of this incredible area lies with the equestrian, mountain biking, and other world-class recreational opportunities accessible to local residents and visitors alike.”

“The Green River Valley is one of our Too Wild To Drill landscapes and thousands of Americans made it clear that we value our public lands as places to explore and learn, not drill and mine. Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument is a national treasure that offers a variety of unique Pacific Northwest experiences for visitors from around the world,” said **Kitty Craig, Washington State Deputy Director of the Wilderness Society**. “Its borders are no place for an industrial mine whose pollution will jeopardize the free-flowing Green River, the drinking water of downstream communities, and the wide range of recreational opportunities these lands and waters provide. It is more than disappointing the Forest Service is moving forward with mining in the monument.”

“With outstanding recreation, as a wild steelhead sanctuary, and as a source of clean drinking water for downstream communities, the Green River, a candidate Wild and Scenic River is the last place for a mine,” said **David Moryc, Director for Wild and Scenic Rivers for American Rivers**. “The Forest Service should not be green-lighting mining on our public lands that were purchased explicitly for conservation and recreation purposes,”

“This prospecting is a threat to wild steelhead in the Green River and the rest of the Toutle and Cowlitz River system,” said **Steve Jones, Director, Clark-Skamania Flyfishers**. “Washington fisheries managers made the upper Green River a Wild Steelhead Gene Bank in 2014 because this habitat offered the best hope for sustaining wild fish in that system. This river drainage needs to be conserved, not exploited.”

"The Green River and its downstream rivers the North Fork Toutle River and Cowlitz are home to three species of wild steelhead and salmon listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA)," said **Rich Simms, founder of the Wild Steelhead Coalition**. "The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife recognized the importance of protecting the Green's winter steelhead population by designating the river as a Wild Steelhead Gene Bank. This potential mining project will undermine the immense work being done to protect these imperiled fish and further threaten three ESA-listed species. It is absurd this ludicrous project is even being considered, yet alone moving forward for approval."

###

#### **PROPOSAL DOCUMENTS:**

Modified EA: [https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-](https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/projects/nepa/52147/66795/72638/Goat_Mountain_MEA_20151217_FINAL.pdf)

[office/projects/nepa/52147/66795/72638/Goat Mountain MEA 20151217 FINAL.pdf](https://eplanning.blm.gov/epl-front-office/projects/nepa/52147/66795/72638/Goat_Mountain_MEA_20151217_FINAL.pdf)

Cascade Forest Conservancy (GPTF) et al modified EA comments: [http://cascadeforest.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/FINAL-Goat-Mountain-MEA-Comments\\_2-4-16.pdf](http://cascadeforest.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/FINAL-Goat-Mountain-MEA-Comments_2-4-16.pdf)

Forest Service FONSI/Draft DN:

[http://a123.g.akamai.net/7/123/11558/abc123/forestservic.download.akamai.com/11558/www/nepa/101692\\_FSPLT3\\_4179191.pdf](http://a123.g.akamai.net/7/123/11558/abc123/forestservic.download.akamai.com/11558/www/nepa/101692_FSPLT3_4179191.pdf)

#### **LEGAL DOCUMENTS:**

Judge Hernandez's Opinion: <https://law.lclark.edu/live/files/17566-gifford-pinchot-mining-decisionpdf>.

#### **MAPS/PHOTOS:**

Map of the Project Area: <http://cascadeforest.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/Map-of-Mt-St-Helens-mine-area-zoomed-in.jpg>

**VIDEO:**

Cascade Forest Conservancy “Mount St. Helens: No Place for a Mine” :  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JjVk78cVNck>