



September 15, 2023

The Honorable Patty Murray  
United States Senate  
154 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Committee on Natural Resources  
United States House of Representatives  
1324 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Maria Cantwell  
United States Senate  
511 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Senate Committee on Energy & Natural Resources  
United States Senate  
304 Dirksen Senate Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Marie Gluesenkamp Perez  
United States House of Representatives  
1431 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC, 2051

*Submitted via email*

**RE: Request for legislative solution to protect the Green River Valley**

Dear Senator Murray, Senator Cantwell, and Representative Gluesenkamp Perez:

We are the Green River Valley Alliance (GRVA), a broad coalition of businesses and organizations united in our goal to protect the Green River Valley in southwestern Washington, adjacent to the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument. On behalf of the 96 undersigned members, we write to request a legislative solution to permanently protect the Green River Valley from the ongoing threat of hardrock mining. The proposed mine would jeopardize the Valley's unique ecological, recreational, and cultural values, and would be located in the foothills of an active volcano. In the sections below, we discuss each of the factors that together make a hardrock mine inappropriate in the Green River Valley and why a legislative solution is justified. We urge Congress to take action to protect this special place in perpetuity.

## **I. Cultural Significance to Local Tribes**

This landscape has significant historical and cultural value to the local Indigenous communities, including the Cowlitz Indian Tribe and the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation. On September 11, 2013, Mount St. Helens was officially listed in the National Register of Historic Places as a Traditional Cultural Property of both the Cowlitz and the Yakama Nation. The Green River Valley lies within the cultural and traditional use territories of these Native Nations. Native people have profound cultural and spiritual connections to this place; a connection that has been maintained since time immemorial. The mountain has provided a source of cultural continuity, representing a key figure in the oral traditions that define the history of the people of this area, standing prominent as a monumental figure. The mountain has been a place where Native people have sought spiritual guidance and harvested traditional foods, materials, and medicines. The construction of an exploitative and extractive hardrock mine in the Green River Valley would be particularly costly to the citizens of the Cowlitz Indian Tribe and the Yakama Nation, whose ability to continue to exercise their way of life, traditions, and customs would be irreversibly impacted by exploitation of this legendary site.

## **II. High Level of Ecological Benefits**

This magnificent landscape is home to endangered wildlife, critical habitat, pristine water quality, and roadless areas, and it is a unique ecosystem recovering from the 1980 eruption of Mt. St. Helens. The Green River is also a state-designated gene bank for steelhead, an eligible Wild and Scenic River, and has been nominated for an Outstanding Resource Waters designation. Additionally, the Quartz Creek watershed within the withdrawal area is classified as state-designated critical salmon habitat. Furthermore, some of the lands were purchased with the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) which has the stated purpose of safeguarding natural areas, water resources, and cultural heritage, and fostering outdoor recreation opportunities. Allowing mining in the area would be contrary to the intent of the LWCF.

## **III. High Level of Recreation Benefits**

The Green River Valley is prized by locals and tourists alike for its recreational opportunities, including the popular Green River Horse Camp, the Goat Mountain Trail (with vistas of Adams, St. Helens, Rainier, and Hood), and the Green River Trail (which leads through the Valley of the Giants, four miles of ancient old-growth forest that remain standing after the 1980 eruption). The area provides abundant opportunities for hiking, fly fishing, horseback riding, mountain biking, hunting, foraging, birding, botanizing, and camping. To demonstrate the value of this landscape, an economic report was carried out by a third party analyzing the recreation benefits in the area. The study demonstrates that outdoor recreation and tourism expenditures in Lewis County

account for an estimated \$233–\$327 million per year, and support 61% of all jobs in the towns closest to the mine site.

#### **IV. Tribal, Bipartisan, and Coalition Opposition to a Mine in the Green River Valley**

We have a strong and diverse base opposing an open-pit mine in the Green River Valley, including the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, Cowlitz Indian Tribe, local politicians, community members, and bipartisan non-profit and recreational organizations. The opposition to the mine has also been covered by local media outlets, including The Columbian, The Chronicle, Oregon Public Broadcasting, The Daily News, KATU & Associated Press, and E&E News.

#### **V. The Need for Legislation**

For over fifteen years, the Cascade Forest Conservancy, the lead entity of the GRVA, has been taking legal action to prevent an open-pit mine in the Green River Valley. In the most recent legal proceeding, a Canadian mining company, Ascot Resources, sought a permit to conduct exploratory drilling for copper, gold, and molybdenum. The US Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management attempted to grant prospecting permits to Ascot Resources in December of 2018. Those permits were successfully challenged in court based on NEPA insufficiency, and were vacated in January of 2022.

This legal victory will not protect the area from mining indefinitely, as Ascot Resources has returned with new and redesigned proposals from similar rulings several times in the past. For this reason, the GRVA is seeking a mineral withdrawal of approximately 46,335 acres of federal lands to permanently protect the Green River Valley against mining (proposed withdrawal area map attached). Although there are other solutions that may safeguard against mining in the short term, like an administrative withdrawal or expanding the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument, the GRVA believes a legislative solution to be the right solution because A) it will protect the area in perpetuity, B) it is more difficult to overturn, and C) it will not impact any other allowed activities including recreational uses and timber harvest.

#### **VI. Conclusion**

A mine by Mount St. Helens would be devastating to the area. Mineral prospecting will contaminate groundwater, impact fish habitat, harm the Traditional Cultural Property of the local Tribes, and impair recreation opportunities. A mine could also have severe impacts on the local economy and jobs in the tourism and recreation sector. With an open-pit mine in particular, threats like a tailings pond breach could have catastrophic consequences for this landscape and downstream communities, poisoning surface and groundwater supplies and potentially

destroying the entire ecosystem. This threat is magnified when considering the proximity of the proposed mine site to Mount St. Helens, an active volcano.

We believe the Green River Valley is no place for a mine and that a legislative mineral withdrawal is needed. With broad coalition support, we formally request a legislative solution to protect the Green River Valley against the threat of mining in perpetuity.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Eddie Espinosa  
Director, Community Programs  
American Alpine Club

Ashleigh Shoecraft  
Executive Director  
Braided Seeds

Sarah Dyrdaahl  
Northwest Region Director  
American Rivers

Dave Swank  
Conservation Director  
Clark-Skamania Flyfishers

Thomas O'Keefe  
Pacific Northwest Stewardship Director  
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Executive Director  
Cascade Forest Conservancy

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Public Lands Chairman  
Back Country Horsemen of Washington

Lauren Goldberg  
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Columbia Riverkeeper

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Cowlitz-Naches Chapter President  
Evergreen Mountain Bike Alliance

John Rettig  
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Federation of Western Outdoor Clubs

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Founder  
Fish Not Gold

Ann Foster  
Board President  
Friends of Clark County

Laurie Kerr  
Broadband Leader  
Great Old Broads for Wilderness - Cascade  
Volcanoes Chapter

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Lower Columbia Canoe Club

Rebekah Phillips  
Executive Director  
Mazamas

Betsy Roblee  
Conservation & Advocacy Director  
The Mountaineers

Mark Sherwood  
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Gabriel Tiller  
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VP of Policy & Government Relations  
Outdoor Alliance

Michael Morrison  
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Allison Ostrer, Court Certified Interpreter  
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Amy Stork Consulting  
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Director of Government Affairs  
Wild Salmon Center

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Wild Steelhead Coalition

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Bar UK River Ranch  
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Jonathan Stumpf  
Washington Advocate  
Wild Steelheaders United

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(Seattle, WA)

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Camas Bike & Sport  
(Camas, WA)

Gabrielle Rafert  
Above & Below, Bee & Garden Service  
(Seattle, WA)

Theresa Regnier  
Carson Ridge Luxury Cabins  
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Kali Barrette  
Adorn Body Art  
(Vancouver, WA)

Bryan Wray  
Compass Coffee Roasting  
(Vancouver, WA)

Joanne Mayhew  
Cooper Point Medical  
(Olympia, WA)

Val Alexander  
Coyote Ridge Ranch  
(La Center, WA)

Chelsea Stowers  
C. Rose's Ink  
(Ridgefield, WA)

Kat Stein  
Dandelion Teahouse & Apothecary  
(Vancouver, WA)

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Domaine Pouillon  
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Evergreen Gravel Racing  
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Kristina Gravette  
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(Lyle, WA)

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Full Plate Farm  
(Ridgefield, WA)

Aryelle Newton  
Harold's Burger Bar  
(Centralia, WA)

Emily Shirron  
Kindred Homestead Supply  
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Alicia LeDuc Montgomery  
LeDuc Montgomery LLC  
(Battle Ground, WA)

Corey Warren  
Live More Creative  
(Bellingham, WA)

Devon Bray  
Loowit Brewing Company  
(Vancouver, WA)

Alex Cook  
Lucky No. 3 Tattoo Company  
(Centralia, WA)

Alicia Nelson  
Maple Tree Goatscaping LLC  
(Kelso, WA)

Kat Carroll  
Medical Vision Center  
(Morton, WA)

Luisa De Paiva  
Monet Vineyards  
(Brush Prairie, WA)

Andy Enser  
Mountain Goat Tattoo, LLC  
(Longview, WA)

Stephanie Lillegard  
North Bank Books  
(Stevenson, WA)

Kacee Kubli  
Oakshire Beer Hall  
(Portland, OR)

Jennie Mastaler  
Octopi Ink  
(Washougal, WA)

J Michelle Swope  
Oly Women on the Fly Guide Service  
(Olympia, WA)

Shalini Kumar  
Optimism Brewing  
(Seattle, WA)

Dion Greenman  
OutWest Imaging  
(Puyallup, WA)

James Owen  
Packwood Station  
(Packwood, WA)

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Pariyatti  
(Onalaska, WA)

James Owen  
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River House Bake Shop  
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Roberta Church, Attorney at Law  
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Laurie Solomon  
Starfire Herbs & Acupuncture  
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John McLarty  
Talking Rocks Outdoor Company  
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Tattoos by Tasha  
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Jamie Erdman  
Thatcher's Coffee  
(Vancouver, WA)

Zac Zuber  
TNS Archery Outdoors  
(Winlock, WA)

Bryan Shull  
Trap Door Brewing  
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Angela Harvey  
Wickering Heights  
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Kirsten Jacobson  
Wildflower Meadows, LLC  
(Vancouver, WA)



Missy Taylor  
Wholesome Living  
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Daren Beenen  
Woodpecker Cycle Co.  
(Lacey, WA)

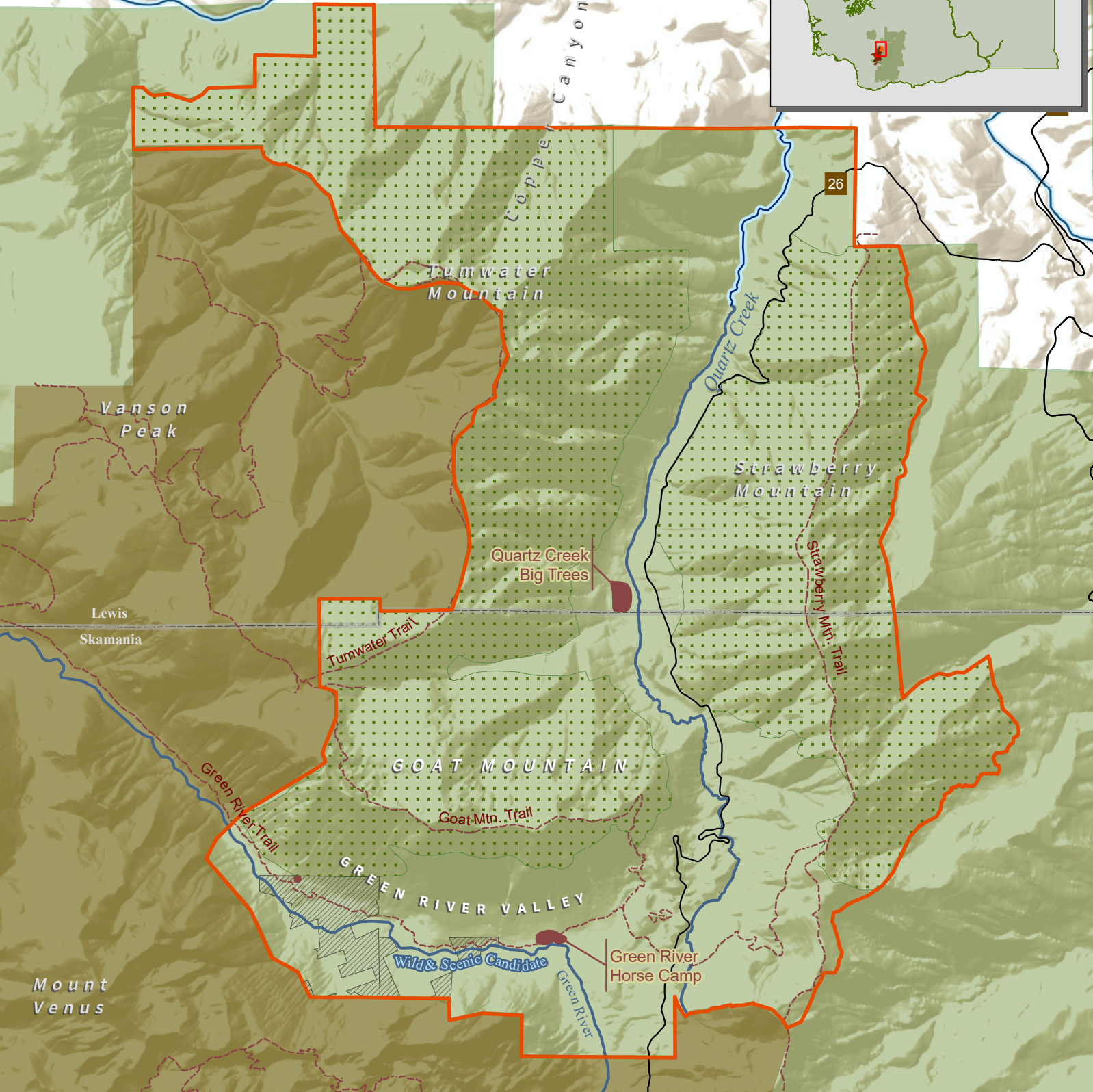
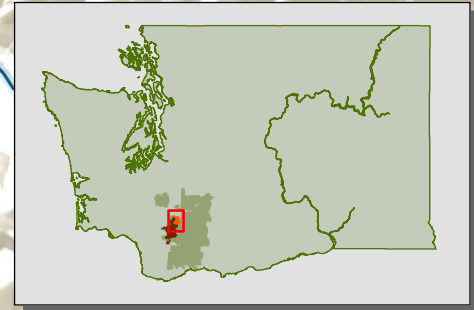
CC:

Elizabeth Berger, Acting Regional Forester, Pacific Northwest Region

Johanna Kovarik, Forest Supervisor, Gifford Pinchot National Forest

Theresa Tanner, District Ranger, Cowlitz Valley Ranger District

# GREEN RIVER VALLEY Proposed Mineral Withdrawal



Proposed withdrawal boundary	Mount St. Helens NVM
Trails	Gifford Pinchot NF
Recreation sites	Private land*
Critical salmon habitat	
Inventoried roadless area	
Lvl 1 Roads	

\* land would be withdrawn if ever acquired by the US government

