



GIFFORD PINCHOT TASK FORCE

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Public Disappointed over Approval of Mount St. Helens Exploratory Drilling Lease

Portland, OR –The US Forest Service approved an exploratory drilling project on December 4, 2012, just north of Mount St. Helens to Ascot Resource. The announcement was swiftly denounced by those who believe exploratory drilling and potentially a mine at Mount St. Helens would destroy the unique ecology and geology of the Monument, pose a serious human health risk, devastate the surrounding environment and communities, interrupt recreational pursuits on public land and violate numerous laws.

“Exploratory drilling and mining is not what was contemplated for this land when it was conveyed to the US Forest Service specifically for the protection of the Green River and scenic values, and yet remarkably the federal agencies approved it anyway. The agencies’ decision should be consistent with the original intent with which the federal government obtained the land.” said Jessica Schafer, Conservation Director with the Gifford Pinchot Task Force, the organization leading the opposition to the proposal.

The Forest Service obtained the land currently approved for exploratory drilling in 1986 from the Trust for Public Land, a conservation non-profit which purchases land to protect it from development. At the time, the Forest Supervisor sent a letter to Washington’s Congressional Delegation stating that the federal government’s acquisition of the property would “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.”

When the federal government opened the issue to public comment earlier this year after announcing their intentions, they were flooded with comments. Over 15 non-profit organizations and sportsman groups signed onto a letter expressing concern about the potential environmental effects of drilling. "A drilling operation or mine could be both an environmental and an economic disaster. To convert land that is public property for profits of a Canadian company just makes no sense. A drilling and mine is incompatible with any other use, so public access for hiking, hunting, horseback riding and other related activities will come to an end," said Craig Lynch, member of the Clark- Skamania Flyfishers.

The proposed site is contiguous with the internationally renowned Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument and actually enters the volcano’s blast zone, making this proposal even less appealing. Opponents fear that the drilling would be devastating for the Green River and the recreational value of the surrounding land. Several key recreational areas are within 1 mile of the proposed drilling area including

Ryan Lake and the Green River horse camp. Effectively closing these areas to use by operating heavy machinery in the vicinity prevents the public from using this area of public lands.

The opposition to exploratory drilling on this land is ever increasing and the federal agencies in this case simply refuse to be responsible stewards of our public lands. “The Forest Service should reject this unpopular proposal now and direct taxpayer dollars to more useful restoration projects,” said Jessica Schafer.

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