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Conservation and Public Accountability Groups File Legal Challenge to the Thacker Pass Lithium Mine

Reno, Nev. — Today a coalition of conservation and public accountability groups [filed federal litigation](#) in the District of Nevada, challenging the Bureau of Land Management's approval of the Thacker Pass Lithium Mine. The mine was [fast tracked](#) by the Trump Administration and completed its environmental review process in less than one year despite its enormous environmental impacts.

"Renewable energy and electric cars aren't green when they depend on mining that destroys important wildlife habitat and causes extinction," said Kelly Fuller, Energy and Mining Campaign Director for Western Watersheds Project. "The Thacker Pass mine will devastate greater sage-grouse and other wildlife. We need to transition to renewables in an environmentally sustainable, rather than an environmentally problematic, way."

Metals mining is the [most polluting industry](#) in the United States, and the local communities of Oroville and Kings River Valley are deeply concerned about how the mine will affect them.

"I am opposed to the Lithium mine being proposed for Thacker Pass," said Wendelyn Muratore, Kings River Valley resident and member of Great Basin Resource Watch. "The impacts to our air quality, destruction of wildlife and habitat, dumping of hazardous chemicals, tightening of our water supply, increase in traffic at 75 semi trucks per day, and damage to our ranching and farming should make one stop and rethink this mine. Our communities along with our way of life and livelihoods should not be made to suffer in the name of 'progress.' "

Thacker Pass is critically important to wildlife because it connects the Double H Mountains to the Montana Mountains. The pass also provides lower-elevation habitat that wildlife need to survive the winter. It contains thousands of acres of the most important type of greater sage-grouse habitat and two pronghorn migration corridors. Golden eagles nesting in the nearby cliffs and canyons forage there for food to feed their chicks. Local springs are the only place in the world where the Kings River pyrg, a rare type of springsnail, are known to live.

"The Bureau of Land Management must manage Thacker Pass and connecting mountains to preserve essential sage grouse habitat, old growth sagebrush, golden eagle nests, endemic springsnails and additional wildlife," said Kevin Emmerich, Co-Founder of Basin and Range Watch. "The unique viewshed and dark skies should be managed to retain the existing character of the landscape. The open pit, waste rock facilities, noise and water use required for the Thacker Pass Lithium Mine all would cause critical damage to a remaining stronghold for local wildlife, and the viewshed will be damaged forever."

Other wildlife at risk from the Thacker Pass mine include Endangered Species Act-listed [Lahontan cutthroat trout](#), bighorn sheep, and pygmy rabbits.

“The Montana Mountains landscape has long been identified as a key area for biodiversity protection in Nevada,” said Katie Fite, Public Lands Director for Wildlands Defense. “Along with adjacent Oregon wild lands, it constitutes one of the last big blocks of the sagebrush sea free of development. Pygmy rabbits, migratory birds and other wildlife suffered a major blow from wildfire a decade ago and habitat has not yet recovered. Now this mega-mine will obliterate vital remaining sagebrush. The mine’s regional disturbance footprint will wallop struggling wildlife populations, causing new declines.”

Today’s legal complaint alleges that the Bureau of Land Management violated federal laws when it approved the Thacker Pass Lithium Mine’s Plans of Operation on January 15, 2021, including the National Environmental Policy Act and Federal Land Policy and Management Act.

“The reckless permitting of the Thacker Pass lithium mine sets a bad precedent for the Energy Transition.” said John Hadder, Director of Great Basin Resource Watch. “An example of getting the permit over good public process and addressing environmental and community concerns. Frontline communities like King River Valley and Orovada, Nevada that would shoulder effects of mining deserve an independent analysis of the mine and ask if all is being done to minimize the need for these raw materials.”

Plaintiffs further argue that BLM failed in its duty to protect public resources by allowing a mine that will be a source of groundwater pollution for at least 300 years and not requiring long-term financial assurances.

According to Lithium Nevada Corporation’s Plans of Operation, the mine would entail:

- excavation of a large open pit roughly 2.3 miles long by about half a mile at the widest
- removal of 17.2 million tons of rock and ore per year (phase 2)
- direct surface disturbance of 5,694 acres (total project size would be 17,933 acres)
- on-site sulfuric acid plant - 5,800 tons of acid per day during phase 2
- ultimately pumping up to 1.7 billion gallons of water per year
- estimated lifetime of 41 years and 5 years of reclamation

Attorneys from Western Mining Action Project and Western Watersheds Project represent Western Watersheds Project, Great Basin Resource Watch, Basin and Range Watch, and Wildlands Defense.

Western Watersheds Project is a nonprofit environmental conservation group dedicated to protecting and restoring wildlife and watersheds throughout the American West.

Great Basin Resource Watch is a nonprofit public interest organization that works with communities to protect their health, land, air, water, and wildlife of the Great Basin from the adverse effects of mining and resource extraction.

Basin and Range Watch is a 501(c)(3) non-profit working to conserve the deserts of Nevada and California and to educate the public about the diversity of life, culture, and history of the ecosystems and wild lands of the desert.

Wildlands Defense works to inspire and empower the preservation of wild lands, wildlife and biodiversity in the West.

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