



American Packrafting Association

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Honorable Secretary Sally Jewell
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Sally Jewell;

The American Packrafting Association writes today to express our appreciation and support for your efforts to reform overdue and much-needed coal-mining regulations with the Stream Protection Rule (SPR). The Department of the Interior and the Office of Surface Mining Reclamation and Enforcement (OSMRE) have done an excellent job integrating science and stakeholder interests to ensure that coal mining becomes sustainable for industry, affected communities, recreation, and the environment.

For American Packrafting Association members, now 1,100 strong, the protection of riparian ecosystems, water quality, and resident wildlife is paramount. Clean water and healthy river ecosystems inspire us to explore landscapes, and thus are a fundamental requirement for packrafting. Our organization was founded with the intention of raising safety and responsibility so that packrafters will minimize the burden on lands, wildlife, and land managers. We work with stakeholders, land managers, and elected officials to eliminate impediments to sustainable and responsible packrafting access, and to preserve the wild lands and waters that we cherish. More information about our organization can be found at www.packraft.org.

For packrafters who thrive among pristine wildlands and rivers throughout the West and Appalachia, an under-regulated coal industry is a great threat. For several decades, we have witnessed the strip mining of headwater summits and the poisoning of rivers in West Virginia, southern Utah, Washington State, southwestern Colorado, and northeastern Wyoming. Fisheries, riparian wildlife, recreation, and local communities have all suffered because of unsustainable mining and reclamation practices. In Alaska, it is critical that the new standards of the Stream Protection Rule be implemented before that state's great coal reserves begin to be mined in earnest. As new roads are built throughout the state for natural gas extraction, coal mining prospects will become more feasible. We have already endured problems that coal mining under-regulation and lack of oversight has caused in Alaska's Matanuska Valley. There, small mines operating intermittently at Wishbone Hill since around 1900 have been plagued with extensive coal fires, blamed for degraded regional air and water quality, and caused the decimation of nearby salmon fisheries. Recently, new large-scale coal mining prospects are being considered for the area. Without more stringent regulation, we fear intensified environmental peril for the Matanuska Valley, and countless river basins that overlap coal mining areas across the country.

As part of the larger human-powered recreation community that contributes \$646 billion to the country's economy, packrafters are a growing voice in river and wildlands recreation and conservation. We are eager to actively and publically support a final Stream Protection Rule that maintains high standards of protection for communities, streams, and the environment. Again, thank you for your hard work on the increasingly important issue of protecting our country's streams from unregulated coal mining.

Sincerely,
Brad Meiklejohn
President, American Packrafting Association
cc: OSMRE Director Joseph Pizarchik