



## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 27, 2026

### CONTACTS:

Anne White, ONDA Policy Manager, [anne@onda.org](mailto:anne@onda.org) - (541) 330-2638 ext. 310

Julie Weikel, GOBW member, [jweikeldvm@gmail.com](mailto:jweikeldvm@gmail.com)

Kelly Fuller, GBRW Mining Justice Organizer, [kelly@gbrw.org](mailto:kelly@gbrw.org) - (775) 453-6892

## Mineral Exploration in the McDermitt Caldera Threatens Sagebrush Stronghold, Prompts Lawsuit by Advocates

One of the last, best sagebrush strongholds remaining for wildlife in Oregon's high desert is at risk from expanded minerals exploration recently authorized by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), a decision conservation and environmental justice organizations are [challenging in court](#).

Today, Oregon Natural Desert Association, Great Old Broads for Wilderness, and Great Basin Resource Watch filed a lawsuit to protect remote wildlands and dozens of vulnerable species from expanded drilling activities in search of lithium on public lands about 20 miles west of McDermitt, Nevada, in southeastern Oregon.

"The McDermitt Caldera is a vital stronghold in Oregon's high desert, an increasingly rare expanse of intact sagebrush steppe and meandering desert streams that are essential to greater sage-grouse, Lahontan cutthroat trout, pygmy rabbit, and a host of other species," said Ryan Houston, Executive Director for Oregon Natural Desert Association. "More intensive mineral exploration would irreversibly damage this ecological haven, further imperiling desert species that depend on these public lands."

The BLM has authorized HiTech Minerals, Inc., a subsidiary of an Australian mining company, Jindalee Lithium Limited, to conduct the largest mineral exploration project in Oregon's history. The company's claim spans 7,200 acres of public lands and will require pumping 18,000 gallons of groundwater daily to support drilling 168 holes in search of minerals.

"Big desert landscapes that provide expansive and unfragmented habitat for wildlife are shrinking. Although the sagebrush sea is a seemingly harsh landscape that has tested generations of ranchers and homesteaders who have chosen to engage in the truths of its austerity, it is really a land of abundance, nourishing both spirit and body with its vibrancy and diversity of life. And yet, it is also incredibly fragile, susceptible to long-lasting alteration from the smallest intrusion," said Julie Weikel, Great Old Broads member and lifelong southeastern Oregon resident. "I have seen time and again the McDermitt community betrayed by promises of economic prosperity

only to have those opportunities disappear as fast as the wind. The scars of this mining on both the land and community will remain long after any exploration is completed.”

The McDermitt Exploration project would be located about 20 miles from the town of McDermitt and the Fort McDermitt Paiute and Shoshone Tribe’s reservation. This extensive and damaging exploration project threatens irreplaceable cultural resources and lands and waters that support hunting, fishing and first foods gathering grounds for Tribal Nations, who have lived in and around the McDermitt Caldera since time immemorial.

“The blood that runs through my veins is older than the Bible, older than the Great Pyramids of Egypt,” said Day Hinkey, a member of the Fort McDermitt Paiute and Shoshone Tribe and plaintiff Great Basin Resource Watch. “My ancestors’ blood, the one that runs through mine, has been bleeding on this continent for Millennia. I have a deep rooted responsibility to take care of this land. Lithium exploration on my ancestral homelands will destroy our ecosystem as we know it. The fresh spring water in our High Desert is more precious than lithium. My traditional medicine in the Northern Caldera will be lost. Indigenous people who still rely on the land, the knowledge I need to pass on to my children and their children is at high risk due to green colonialism. Cultural genocide of the First Citizens of this land rages on.”

The McDermitt Caldera has also supported a multi-generation family ranch that has worked collaboratively with state and federal agencies to conserve imperiled fish and wildlife that rely on the irreplaceable habitats in this area.

“HiTech’s proposed actions threaten the ecological balance we have spent generations protecting and the very existence of our operation,” said Nick and Jaimi Wilkinson, owners of GJ Livestock, LLC and members of Great Basin Resource Watch who will be directly affected by the project. “This is not theoretical harm—it is immediate, material, and permanent. HiTech’s project would dismantle critical habitat, degrade essential water resources, and ultimately eliminate a six-generation cattle operation that has long been part of the solution—not the problem. For decades, we have worked in coordination with state and federal agencies to conserve sensitive species, including the Lahontan cutthroat trout and greater sage-grouse, because we understand that healthy waterways and intact sagebrush habitats are inseparable from sustainable ranching.”

The BLM received nearly 2,300 public comments on its environmental assessment prior to approving this controversial plan of operations. Public input expressed a wide array of significant environmental and other concerns, including criticizing how the agency’s draft assessment ignored or downplayed many of these concerns as they were raised throughout the process.

“First the Trump Administration disrespected the directly affected communities by trying to pass off a five-day comment period on the Environmental Assessment,” said John Hadder, Executive Director of Great Basin Resource Watch. “And then it releases a very inadequate assessment that does not provide a complete understanding of the consequences of the project. People living near proposed mining activities deserve a greater voice in how and if these projects go forward. They will have to shoulder the burdens brought by mining—potentially an unhealthy environment, loss of lifestyle, and permanent loss of culture associated with the lands.”



*McDermitt Caldera in Oregon as seen from the proposed exploration site. Photo credit: John Aylward*

###