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UNESCO Considers “World Heritage Site in Danger” Designation for Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park: Proposed Coal Mine in BC’s Flathead River Valley Triggers United Nations Assessment

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE May 26, 2009

Vancouver, Victoria and Fernie, BC—UNESCO’s World Heritage Committee has agreed to consider a petition from 11 Canadian and US conservation groups asking that Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park be designated a “World Heritage Site in Danger”, due to a proposed coal mine and other development in BC’s adjoining Flathead River Valley.

The World Heritage Committee will consider the request—by Sierra Club BC, Wildsight and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS) among other groups—at its June 22 to 30 session in Seville, Spain.

“The Flathead River Valley provides critical habitat for rare and endangered species that migrate to and from Waterton-Glacier, and it has the highest density of grizzly bears in the interior of North America,” said Wildsight spokesperson Ryland Nelson, who will attend the Seville session. “We’re asking the World Heritage Committee to assess potentially grave impacts on water and wildlife in Waterton-Glacier, given that BC’s land use plan for the Flathead River Valley prioritizes mining and energy development.”

A US Department of the Interior report says heavy metals and other contaminants from Cline Mining Corp’s proposed mountain top removal coal mine, currently under review by the BC Environmental Assessment Office, will reach Glacier National Park via the transboundary Flathead River in as little as 24 hours.

“Cline plans to remove 40 million tonnes of coal and dump waste rock into Foisey Creek, a headwaters stream of the Flathead River 35 kilometres upstream from this World Heritage Site,” said Sierra Club BC spokesperson Sarah Cox. “Scientists have identified Foisey Creek as critical habitat for threatened bull trout and genetically-pure westslope cutthroat trout migrating from Glacier Park to spawn in the Flathead River—which was recently named BC’s most endangered river and is in urgent need of permanent protection.”

“We hope the World Heritage Committee will review stewardship of this globally-significant wilderness, and make recommendations about how to protect this extraordinary place,” said Chloe O’Loughlin, Executive Director of CPAWS BC. “BC’s Flathead River Valley is the long-recognized missing piece of Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, and the BC government should allow it the same high level of protection.”

Waterton-Glacier will become the 31st “World Heritage Site in Danger”, and the only one in North America, if the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) committee decides to add the park—the world’s first international peace park and a UNESCO World Biosphere Reserve—to the list of world heritage in danger.

Conservation groups are calling for a National Park in the lower one-third of the Flathead River Valley and for a Wildlife Management Area to be established in the rest of the valley and adjoining habitat.

For more information on the World Heritage Petition visit - <http://tinyurl.com/wgdanger>

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