The East Fork of the South Fork of the Salmon River is a very special place to me. When my husband and I were dating, it was the first spot we went camping together. It was the first place I saw a Cedar Waxwing, and it was the only place I’ve sustained a kayaking injury that required stitches. All of these were profound experiences in my life. We have returned many times over the last 18 years and have always valued the area as one of the few remaining locales in Idaho that is still relatively pristine. The thought that the beauty and quality of this area could be forever ruined by the Midas Gold project is devastating. I have many concerns about this proposal, if it is allowed to go forward as written. I am asking that the Forest Service address these issues:

The existing proposal includes a plan to fill the surrounding valleys with mountains of waste rock and tailings, which are potentially toxic. Midas further claims that it will restore fish passage to spawning streams, while at the same time burying over a mile of spawning habitat under hundreds of feet of mining waste and tailings. I question whether this is even legal under federal statutes to protect endangered salmon habitat, but also ask you how this makes any logical sense. The Forest Service cannot allow this aspect of the proposal to be approved and must find alternative ways to store tailings so salmon habitat is protected.

Water contamination from acids, chemicals, and heavy metals is a very real risk with this proposal. Given the history of "pit lakes" turning to sterile acid lakes that are a perpetual threat to the surrounding waters; I do not see how USFS can approve a plan that would allow such pits to remain after Midas is gone. The Forest Service must take steps to ensure that the watershed is protected; all possible safeguards must be strong and clearly defined before allowing the project to proceed. I’m afraid that this may not be possible and, as such, the project should not go forward.

Midas has made a big show of promising to fix the past sins of the mining industry in the area and restore the site upon completion of the project. We can’t simply take them at their word, though. Their interest is in short-term profits, not long-term environmental effects. And we certainly cannot ignore the LONG history of mining companies abandoning projects, polluting water, destroying wildlife habitat and scarring the landscape. The Forest Service must ensure that Midas is not allowed to repeat this. The only way to do that is to scale back or deny this project and/or require Midas to place all restoration funds in a bond, before a single rock is dug.

In summary, I do not support the Midas Gold proposal as it is written and ask that the Forest Service does not allow it to proceed. The risks far outweigh the benefits and the water quality and fish habitat of the South Fork Salmon watershed are simply too important to risk.

Thank you for your consideration.