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Ref: ORA-N

Mary C. Erickson, Forest Supervisor
CGNF, Gardiner Ranger District, USDA Forest Service
Attn: East Boulder Mine Amendment 004 EIS
C/O: Robert Grosvenor
P.O. Box 5
Gardiner, MT 59030

Dear Supervisor Erickson:

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has reviewed the May 27, 2022 Notice of Intent (NOI) to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the East Boulder Mine Amendment 004 project (Project) by the US Department of Agriculture Forest Service (USFS) Custer Gallatin National Forest (CGNF) and Montana Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ). The following scoping comments were prepared in accordance with our responsibilities under Section 102(2)(C) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The Project will amend the current operational mining plan for the East Boulder Mine, an active platinum and palladium mine operated by Stillwater Mining Company in Sweet Grass County, Montana, located on federally managed lands within the CGNF approximately 16 miles south of McLeod, MT. This amendment would also amend the Montana state mine Operating Permit Number 00149. The proposed action would allow for 474 more acres of surface disturbance and the construction of the new Lewis Gulch Tailings Storage Facility (LGTSF) and Dry Fork Waste Rock Storage Area (DFWRSA) near the current East Boulder Mine tailings facility along the East Boulder River. Construction, operation, closure, and reclamation of the Amendment 004 activities would occur over a 20-year period and alongside the other activities outlined in the preexisting East Boulder Mine Plan of Operations.

Based on our current understanding of the Project and the preliminary information available, our initial areas of interest for the Draft EIS are: (1) water resources; (2) air resources; (3) climate change; (4) mitigation and monitoring measures; (5) environmental justice; and (6) critical habitat and special status species. We recommend providing and discussing in the Draft EIS the data or previous studies used to support the analyses for each resource area. A detailed description of the baseline conditions related to each resource is also recommended for the No Action Alternative, especially where the baseline conditions may be changed by potential Project impacts to environmental quality. We also recommend the Draft EIS provide an analysis of both the Project's potential direct and indirect impacts to the surrounding environment during all mining phases (i.e., during construction, operation, closure, and reclamation). Furthermore, we recommend that the Draft EIS establish the content of the preexisting East Boulder Mine Plan of Operations and use it to differentiate the mining actions already implemented from those proposed by the Project. Clearly separating the current resource and operational baseline conditions from the expected Project impacts throughout the Draft EIS alternatives analysis will serve the Draft EIS by keeping the interpretation of impact distinct among Project alternatives.

Enclosed are our detailed comments. We appreciate your consideration of our comments at this early stage of project development and are committed to working with you as you prepare the Draft EIS. If further explanation of our comments is desired, please contact me at (303) 312-6155 or mccoy.melissa@epa.gov, or Carolyn Gleason, Lead Reviewer for this project at (303) 312-6641 or gleason.carolyn@epa.gov.

Sincerely,

Melissa W. McCoy

Melissa W. McCoy, Ph.D.
NEPA Branch Manager
Office of the Regional Administrator

Enclosure

Enclosure -EPA Comments
USFS East Boulder Mine Amendment EIS

General Comments

Based on the broad nature of the potential impacts and the analyses needed for this type of project, we recommend USFS distinguish between Project actions and actions under the preexisting East Boulder Mine Plan of Operations in the Draft EIS using a combination of visual tools and detailed description. These visual tools could include tables of comparison between mine operational parameters (e.g., extraction rates, mineral rights, total disturbed area, etc.), scale, timelines, and impacted areas for each Project alternative. Other visual tools that we recommend for inclusion in the Draft EIS are maps illustrating baseline characteristics such as property ownership, access roads, support facilities, pipelines, the reference number and extent of the proposed or existing mine claims, and the areal extent of the underground mine workings. These visual tools would help the impacts analysis sections by giving the public a common frame of reference that can be overlayed with environmental data. These environmental data could include the areal extents of key resources such as critical habitat, water resources, residential properties, and wetland areas and we encourage USFS to use these visualizations for illustrating resource impact differences between Project alternatives.

Generally, mine expansion environmental impact analyses consider all aspects of the mine and connected transportation because the mine life and the area of impact for the mine (e.g., underground workings and surface level support facilities) would be greater than those anticipated in the original EIS. The May 27, 2022 opportunity to comment letter sent to EPA by USFS focuses the scope of the Draft EIS on waste rock and tailings storage and access roads and support pipeline expansions but does not mention other expansions that may be connected. The letter details a total increase of 474 acres of disturbed area attributed to the proposed Plan of Operations amendment yet the footprints of the LGTSF and the DFWRSA account for only 223 acres of the total amendment area. While USFS access roads and supply pipelines would also be moved as a part of the action, contributing to the disturbance area, it is not clear what the remaining 251 acres of disturbance would include and if the action may include leasing or facilitating access to previously unimpacted federal lands and mineral resources. We therefore request that USFS clarify in the Draft EIS whether and how any of the Project alternatives may, at least in part, facilitate the need for the new storage facilities by expanding the size or extending the operating life of the mine compared to that anticipated in the original EIS. If so, resource impacts from the expansion or life extension of the mine should also be evaluated.

Water Resources

EPA considers the protection of aquatic resources to be among the most important issues to be addressed in any NEPA analysis for mining activity. The proposed action has the potential to adversely impact aquatic resources, including surface waters, groundwater, wetlands, springs, seeps, riparian areas, and their supporting hydrology. Therefore, we recommend that USFS include baseline water resource information and impact analyses in the EIS. We also recommend the information outlined in the subsections below consider any impacts that may occur in the event of a Project impoundment containment failure or slow leak. Due to the size of the LGTSF and the DFWRSA and the upstream location of the Project relative to local land operators and private residences along the East Boulder River we also recommend specifying any potential ‘worst case’ mine waste containment or pipeline failure impacts to water resources in the Draft EIS.

Existing Conditions. Existing resource conditions provide the basis for an effective analysis of potential impacts. Therefore, we recommend the Draft EIS include the following baseline water resource information (see additional information in sections below):

- A map and summary of project area waters, including streams, tributaries, lakes, springs, seeps and wetlands. It would be helpful if the summary identified high resource value waterbodies and their designated beneficial uses (e.g., agriculture, fisheries, drinking water, recreation);
- Watershed conditions including vegetation cover and composition, and soil conditions;
- Surface water information including available water quality data in relation to current standards, stream functional assessments, stream channel and stream bank stability conditions, sediment loads, and aquatic life;
- Types, functions, and acreages of wetlands, riparian areas, and springs, including ephemeral systems;
- A map and list of Clean Water Act (CWA) impaired or threatened waterbody segments within or downstream of the project area, including the designated uses of the waterbodies, the specific pollutants of concern, and any available information on the sources of those pollutants;
- Generalized maps depicting the location of sensitive groundwater resources such as sole source aquifers (available from the EPA Sole Source Aquifer website at https://www.epa.gov/dwssa), municipal watersheds, source water protection zones, sensitive aquifers, superficial aquifers, and recharge areas.

Water Quality Data. Water quality data and data sources for the streams and lakes in the analysis area provide important information to guide management for this project, as well as a baseline for future monitoring of impacts and evaluation of potential influence on downstream water quality. We recommend the Draft EIS provide a summary of available information and monitoring data on water quality for the project area including parameters such as total metals, total nitrogen, total dissolved solids, total suspended solids, temperature and those of interest for impaired waterbodies downstream of the project area. Identification of any significant gaps in data may be helpful in developing a project monitoring plan or amending the existing mine monitoring plan to include the Project area.

Drinking Water Supply Sources. If the project may have the potential to impact sources of drinking water, we recommend the Draft EIS include a map, appropriate for public dissemination, showing the generalized locations of all source water assessment and protection areas associated with public drinking water supplies. We also recommend the Draft EIS include an assessment of potential project impacts to municipal and private water supplies, and source water protection areas, and include design criteria and mitigation options for protecting these high value drinking water resources from potential Project impacts.

Potential Impacts to Wetlands. The protection and restoration of wetlands and riparian areas is a high priority. These resources increase landscape and species diversity, support many wildlife species, and are critical for protecting water quality and designated beneficial water uses. We recommend the Draft EIS include a description of the impacts that may result from Project activities to wetlands and associated springs and spring runs. For assessment of impacts to jurisdictional waters and wetlands we also recommend that the Project consult with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (Corps) to use their regional assessment methodology.

The impacts identified may include functional conversion of wetlands (e.g., forested to shrub-scrub); changes to supporting wetland hydrology (e.g., snow melt patterns, sheet flow, and groundwater

hydrology); wetland erosion or aggradation from runoff channelization or redirection; changes to aquatic biota; and wetland disturbance and loss (if you think it is possible). If impacts are anticipated, we also recommend the Draft EIS describe how USFS intends "to minimize the destruction, loss or degradation of wetlands, and to preserve and enhance the natural and beneficial values of wetlands" as described in Executive Order (EO) 11990, Protection of Wetlands, including how wetlands will be identified and avoided, and how unavoidable impacts would be mitigated.

Discharge of dredged or fill material into waters of the United States, including wetlands, is regulated under CWA Section 404. This permit program is administered jointly by the Corps and the EPA. Please consult with the Corps to determine the applicability of CWA Section 404 permit requirements to wetlands that would be impacted by Project activities and to ensure appropriate minimization measures are applied to avoid adverse impacts to wetlands.

We recommend avoiding impacts to aquatic resources that are considered "difficult to replace" under the EPA's and the Corps' Final Rule for Mitigation for Losses of Aquatic Resources [33 CFR Parts 325 and 332; 40 CFR Part 230 (73 FR 19594, April 10, 2008)]. The rule emphasizes the need to avoid and minimize impacts to these "difficult-to-replace" resources and requires that any compensation be provided by in-kind preservation, rehabilitation, or enhancement to the extent practicable. We recommend restoration plans require that soil profiles and hydrology are re-established as much as possible to the original state. In addition, the EPA recommends USFS consider the mitigation rule to protect aquatic resources even when a CWA Section 404 permit is not required. Where impacts can't be avoided, EPA recommends USFS reduce impacts by applying specific mitigation requirements and best management practices (BMPs) for construction, maintenance and reclamation activities to prevent adverse impacts to sensitive soils, wetlands, springs, seeps, riparian areas, meadows, stream crossings, and critical habitat downslope of the Project site. These could include silt fences, detention ponds and other stormwater control measures.

Water Quality Impacts and Mitigation. EPA recommends that the Project identify impacts to jurisdictional and non-jurisdictional waters and discuss impacts to overall water quality. This assessment should include the disclosure of which waters may be impacted, the nature of the impacts, and the specific pollutants involved. The following are specific areas that EPA recommends the Draft EIS analyze in the water quality impact assessment:

- Operational Waters: Potential impacts to water quality caused by the proposed mine operations including management of tailings, muds, and discharge waters. We recommend also including detailed descriptions of current and planned operational water monitoring activities and operational water constituents, volumes, pH, and any onsite or downstream water handling systems.
- Sedimentation: Potential impacts to water quality from runoff associated with surface disturbances such as road and support structure construction or subsidence related to mining near-surface materials. This runoff would include sheetwash from the Project catchment area into nearby surface water resources such as creeks or ponds. Specifically, we recommend assessing the potential for runoff to modify sediment loads and introduce salts, heavy metals, and other pollutants into surface water as Project mining progresses.
- Groundwater: Potential impacts to local aquifers and the regional groundwater catchment from infiltration through the mine, the proposed LGTSF and DFWRSA, and the macropores or fissures it may induce from existing and proposed operations. This also includes potential groundwater emergences such as springs or seeps. Additional guiding questions for this analysis are included in the subsection below.

EPA recommends the Draft EIS identify and discuss how surface water quality will be protected by Project activities. To this end, the EPA recommends the NEPA analysis include:

- A list of BMPs that will be required to protect surface water resources;
- A discussion of the circumstances under which the BMPs would be applied (e.g., proximity to surface water resources, presence of erosive soils, slope, subsidence, etc.); and
- An explanation of how USFS or another government entity would ensure that the BMPs would be monitored to ensure timely and correct implementation as well as timely maintenance.

Guiding Questions on Groundwater Resources. Given the close proximity of the Project to the East Boulder River and the unknown extent of its contributing area, a broad analysis of groundwater in the Project catchment and its potential impacts from Project activities is recommended. There may be hydrologic connections to local aquifers in and around the Project vicinity that should be considered because they may influence public water supplies, springs, or wetlands. We therefore recommend that the USFS consider the following guiding questions regarding groundwater resource impacts from current and proposed operations at the Project site:

- What are the current and projected discharge amounts from the mine, LGTSF, and DFWRSA, as a result of groundwater infiltration or intersection?
- What are the effects of the various tailings and wastewater disposal options (percolation ponds, injection wells, land disposal applications) to groundwater?
- What is the permitted capacity of the Boe Ranch Injection Well?
- What is the estimated infiltration rate of the percolation ponds?
- How many groundwater dependent seeps and springs are currently in the area and what changes in discharge volume and water quality are anticipated as a result of intercepting groundwater through mine, LGTSF, and DFWRSA development? How would this be monitored?
- At a basin scale, what hydrogeologic connections exist between the Project area and Sweet Grass County?
- What is the capacity and design of the current wastewater and stormwater handling system for the mine? Is it capable of handling any additional volume of groundwater generated by the Project during the construction of the mine, LGTSF, and DFWRSA?
- What groundwater/surface water interactions exist in and around the current wastewater and stormwater handling system?
- What are the current groundwater monitoring requirements regarding Project tailings and waste rock storage piles and how do they compare to proposed requirements?
- Will water in contact with the underground workings result in acid rock drainage? (ARD) or metal leaching? In addition to ARD and metal leaching, we recommend the Draft EIS characterize whether the chemistry of mine waters would be influenced by explosives use because the use of explosives often results in increased nitrate and ammonia concentrations in mine waters.
- What treatment is expected for any mine backfill material (i.e., will cement or other amendments be added to the backfill) and how may that treatment relate to potential subsidence and groundwater quality impacts?

Guiding Questions on Surface Water Resources. We recommend USFS consider the following guiding questions regarding surface water resource impacts from the current and proposed operations at the Project site:

- How will the temperature of surface impoundment discharges impact the temperature of nearby surface waters and the habitat of any resident aquatic life?
- How will stormwater be managed to prevent impacts to the East Boulder River, its tributaries, and any riparian wetlands?
- Is the current wastewater and stormwater handling system effective in the winter? We recommend an evaluation of how freezing conditions, flooding, and snow cover affect its continued operation and storage capacity. We recommend the Draft EIS detail how water quality standards will be met with consideration of existing operations and any proposed expansion.
- Which aquatic species may be affected by Project activities and could such effects lead to impacts on terrestrial species?

Air Resources

Existing Air Quality and Air Quality Related Values (AQRVs). It is important to characterize the existing air quality baseline in relation to potential changes in air quality resulting from the alternatives. Therefore, we recommend characterizing existing air quality for criteria pollutants and AQRVs (including visibility and deposition). For criteria pollutants we recommend coordinating with the MDEQ to establish representative design values (background pollutant concentrations) based on the most recent monitoring data. Data are also available to the public through EPA's outdoor air monitor webpage at: https://www.epa.gov/outdoor-air-quality-data/interactive-map-air-quality-monitors, as well as through the EPA's Air Quality System (AQS) for AQS users.

We recommend providing any available monitoring data that characterizes the existing emissions or impacts of the mine. In order to fully understand the air quality information, we also recommend presenting a map that shows the monitoring stations used (both background and existing mining monitors). We also recommend that the analysis identify any sensitive receptors in the vicinity of the mine such as residences or occupied areas and include those receptors on a map in relation to the existing and proposed mining facilities.

We recommend characterizing trends in visibility near the Project and at adjacent sensitive areas utilizing data available through the IMPROVE monitoring network as well as information prepared by the Federal Land Managers (FLMs) for areas they manage. It may be appropriate to work with the appropriate FLM regarding existing AQRVs in areas they manage. Information is also available online at:

- https://www.epa.gov/outdoor-air-quality-data/interactive-map-air-quality-monitors;
- http://vista.cira.colostate.edu/Improve/;
- https://www.nps.gov/subjects/air/park-conditions-trends.htm (for information at Yellowstone National Park); and
- https://www.fs.fed.us/air/wilderness_monitoring.htm (for information at North Absaroka Wilderness).

Existing deposition may be characterized utilizing the NADP monitoring network in conjunction with total deposition (TDEP) estimates as well as information available from the FLM's, cited above. See http://nadp2.slh.wisc.edu/committees/tdep/tdepmaps/. Areas that may be of interest to the analysis include but are not limited to Yellowstone National Park and North Absaroka Wilderness.

Air Quality and AQRV Impact Analysis. To disclose the potential impacts of the Project on air quality and AQRVs, we recommend the EIS include an equipment roster and emission inventory for the No Action and Action Alternatives that includes construction, operation, and reclamation of the mine and is inclusive of all mobile and stationary emission sources. The emission inventory is the basis of the analysis and is therefore the first important step of the analysis. The mine is currently operational so there are existing emissions that are occurring and would be expected to occur to a similar or greater extent in the future, should the mine plan amendment be approved. Therefore, we recommend the EIS describe current mining techniques sufficient to understand the emissions generating activities. This would include identifying whether equipment will be electric or diesel and whether the site has line power and any diesel backup power. Presenting an equipment roster will foster the creation of an emission inventory for mine-related emissions. We recommend estimating emissions from all equipment and operations including blasting and milling of the ore, worker commute, fuel supply deliveries, ore transport, and dust generated from waste rock dumps and disturbed areas. If it is anticipated that further drilling will take place in connection to the Project, we recommend including emissions from the drill rig in the analysis. Should MDEQ air permits include an estimate of emissions from a particular source we recommend that be adopted for use in the Draft EIS to the extent that the parameters for the calculations are consistent with those being used for the NEPA analysis. We are available to assist with methods for calculating emissions. Based on the emission inventory we recommend determining what level of analysis is appropriate to inform the decision.

In order to disclose impacts from the alternatives on air resources, we recommend the EIS address the following:

- Impacts from each of the criteria pollutants (ozone, particulate matter, carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, sulfur dioxide and lead) with respect to their appropriate National Ambient Air Quality Standards;
- Impacts to AQRVs in potentially impacted Class I areas and any sensitive areas identified as being relevant to the impact area in collaboration with Cooperating Agencies and FLMs; and
- Impacts that could result from exposure to Hazardous Air Pollutants (HAPs) based on emission estimates. If substantial HAPs emissions are projected, we recommend basing impact significance on relevant health-based risk thresholds for HAPs. We are available to provide assistance with methods of analysis and appropriate characterization of available thresholds.

Climate Change

We recommend the Draft EIS include a climate change analysis, including a discussion of the Project's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. EPA encourages USDA to use the Council on Environmental Quality *Final Guidance for Federal Departments and Agencies on the Consideration of Greenhouse Gas Emissions and the Effects of Climate Change in NEPA Reviews* (August 1, 2016) in its analysis of the GHG emissions and climate impacts on the planning area. This guidance provides a reasonable approach for USFS to outline the framework for analysis regarding GHG emissions, opportunities to reduce those emissions, climate impacts on the planning area and climate change adaptation strategies.

Consistent with Executive Order 14008 goals, we encourage measures to provide for diverse, healthy ecosystems that are resilient to climate stressors; require effective mitigation and encourage voluntary mitigation to offset the adverse impacts of projects or actions; reduce GHG emissions from authorized activities to the lowest practical levels; identify and protect areas of potential climate refugia; reduce barriers to plant migration; and use pollinator-friendly plant species in reclamation and revegetation. We

also recommend USFS select resilient native species for replanting during reclamation. USFS should also anticipate the effects rising temperatures may have on seeds/seedlings growth and the vulnerability of specific species under projected climate conditions in the short and longer term.

Social Cost of GHGs. EPA recommends USFS include estimates of the Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases (SC-GHG), which reflect the best available science and methodologies, to monetize the value of net changes in direct and indirect GHG emissions resulting from the Project and its connected actions such as ore transportation and smelting. This analysis would assess climate impacts and help weigh their significance in cost-benefit balancing for the Project. The February 2021 Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases Technical Support Document: Social Cost of Carbon, Methane, and Nitrous Oxide Interim Estimates under Executive Order 13990 (developed by the Interagency Working Group on Social Cost of Greenhouse Gases, United States Government) provides the most current information on generating these calculations (https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/TechnicalSupportDocument_SocialCostofCarbonMethaneNitrousOxide.pdf).

EPA also recommends that SC-GHG calculations give specific information regarding the social cost estimate related to individual gases (i.e., use SC-CO_2 to monetize CO_2 emissions changes, and use SC-CH_4 to monetize CH_4 emissions changes).

Mitigation and Monitoring

Mitigation. We recommend the Draft EIS identify the appropriate mitigation, control measures and stipulations that will be applied to Project activities and to any potential failures for the mining and waste control structures (i.e., the LGTSF, DFWRSA, and onsite reverse osmosis plant), including what entity will be executing the mitigation, inspection schedules, documentation procedures, and accountability processes. With these considerations in mind, we recommend the Draft EIS include the following information for each mitigation measure:

- Designation of the entity responsible for implementing the mitigation;
- A defined monitoring plan;
- Specific environmental thresholds which would trigger action;
- Management alternatives and mitigation measures that would be implemented should a threshold be exceeded;
- Identification of funding sources and the financial assurances established within Project permits;
- Mechanisms for the public disclosure of the monitoring data, its analysis, and related management decisions; and
- Specific temporal milestones to meet reclamation standards.

A list of all necessary permits for construction, transportation, water, air, or land use in the Project vicinity may also clarify implementation and mitigation plans in the EIS.

We recommend the NEPA analysis also include an outline of how the mine would be closed in addition to the LGTSF and DFWRSA site closures and the impacts that could be anticipated during closure and post-closure activities. This could include backfilling, water management and monitoring, and any need or plans for the continued operation and maintenance of stormwater runoff controls.

Financial assurance is the cornerstone of controlling and mitigating the long-term environmental impacts from mining. We recommend the Draft EIS discuss if the leasing of this federal parcel requires assessing

a new cost estimate to direct the value of the bonding.

Monitoring Plan. It will be important to include a monitoring program to identify resource impacts, mitigation needs, and whether reclamation milestones are met throughout the life of the Project. EPA recommends the Draft EIS describe the features of an effective monitoring plan for project activities. The monitoring plan should include environmental thresholds with protocols to assess whether thresholds are being exceeded for each impacted resource and if there is a need to modify management actions. We recommend including the monitoring plan in the Draft EIS to allow the opportunity for public input. We further recommend the monitoring plan include details regarding the general timing of implementing the plan and the timing of monitoring for water and air quality (i.e., time of year, sampling intervals, etc.). Timely monitoring is particularly important and will help determine whether thresholds are being met and if there is any need for specific corrective actions. We recommend the NEPA document discuss the process that will be applied if monitoring budgets fall short of the need for this project. Typically, lack of monitoring would automatically trigger a more environmentally conservative set of mitigation measures.

Rural Communities and Environmental Justice

Consistent with Executive Orders 13985, *Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government* (86 Fed. Reg. 7009 (Jan. 25, 2021)) and 14008, *Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad* (86 Fed. Reg. 7619 (Feb. 1, 2021)), EPA recommends meaningfully engaging with rural communities and stakeholders around the Project area and addressing their concerns with respect to the potential environmental impacts of the proposed project. Rural communities (including subsistence households) are often more closely linked to ecosystems and their services, making it especially important that people living in such communities have opportunities for input into decision-making about local land use and utilization of natural resources. Limited broadband access may warrant holding public meetings about the proposed project in rural locations and at times when community members are most likely to be able to attend.

Executive Order 12898, *Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations,* applies to federal agencies that conduct activities that substantially affect human health or the environment. In addition, Executive Order 13985, *Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government*, sets expectations for a whole -of-government approach to advancing equity for all. Consistent with these executive orders and CEQ's Environmental Justice Guidance Under NEPA (available along with other environmental justice resources at https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/environmental-justice-and-national-environmental-policy-act), EPA recommends the Draft EIS for the Project:

- Identify any minority, low-income and indigenous communities within the geographic scope of the impact area, including the sources of data and a description of the methodology and criteria utilized.
- Document the engagement of such communities with respect to USFS' decisions on this Project. See *EJ IWG Promising Practices for EJ Methodologies in NEPA Reviews* (3/2016) for further information and recommendations for enhancing public participation in NEPA analyses.
- Assess the environmental justice and other socioeconomic concerns for such communities, including:
    - A discussion of the potential environmental impacts of management area decisions on the health of these communities, including air quality and water quality impacts.

    - An evaluation of the socioeconomic impacts to these communities, including the potential for any additional burden placed on local communities' abilities to provide necessary public services and amenities.
    - A determination of whether and how there may be disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects, including cumulative effects, compared to a representative reference population, =associated with the proposed project on the identified communities.
- Include mitigation measures or alternatives to avoid or reduce any disproportionate adverse impacts. We recommend involving the affected communities in developing the measures.

Critical Habitat

According to the USFWS Threatened and Endangered Species Active Critical Habitat Report online mapper tool (accessed June 10, 2022), the planning area is located in critical habitat for Canada Lynx (*Lynx canadensis*), which is listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Early coordination with the USFWS on this Draft EIS will therefore be important for the Project. While some of this planning may have already occurred for the mine in previous NEPA analyses, data and best management practices for ESA-listed species and delineated critical habitat may have changed since the last planning process for the mine and we recommend it be reexamined with the USFWS for the Draft EIS. We also recommend documenting consultation with the USFWS and the agency's recommendations for design criteria, mitigation, monitoring, and adaptive management strategies in the Draft EIS.