



Kendall Cikanek, District Ranger
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Baker City, OR 97814

Submitted electronically: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=45945>

July 26, 2022

Bill Harvey
Commission Chair
bharvey@bakercounty.org

Re: Powder River Mining Draft Environmental Impact Statement

Dear District Ranger Cikanek:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Powder River Mining Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Baker County supports Alternative 3, the Agency Preferred Alternative, “Plans of Operations as submitted by the Miners with Forest Service Requirements” as it provides clarity as to what is expected from mining operations. Since mining operations must meet all applicable Federal and State laws and regulations, it is important that mining operations get the requirements in a way that addresses the multitude of laws and regulations in a single document. Too, by following the additional requirements, it lends an extra layer of security to the miner should conflicts arise regarding Clean Water, ESA, or other State or Federal agency concerns.

The County does not support the Forest Service in collecting multiple mining operation’s Plans of Operations, before conducting an EIS. Simply, this takes too much time and leaves prospective operations in limbo for many, many years. The County encourages to the Forest Service to address Plans of Operations as they come in for review. Permitting on historic mined public land should be capped at 3-6 months for operations that require an EA and no longer than 3-years for operations that require an EIS. On undisturbed public land, EAs should take no longer than 6-12 months and 3-5 years for an EIS. Baker County encourages the Forest Service at the National level to provide additional professionals and resources to the local District to meet these goals.

While Baker County fully supports access to the mining claims including authorizing use of previously “closed” roads, existing user-created temporary roads, and miner-created temporary roads, the County strongly objects to any roads being cataloged as “closed”. As a reminder, the currently approved Forest Plan states that all Wallowa-Whitman National Forest is OPEN to travel. Therefore, no roads should be closed, and any that

need that consideration should be reviewed in Coordination with the County.

Mining has been a historic use of public lands. Indeed, it is the resource that brought people into Baker County and built communities. To this day, mining on public lands continues our customs, cultures, and promotes economic viability. Baker County promotes the multiple use of public lands, including mining.

Baker County would like to work towards making projects and their corresponding Plans successful from development through monitoring. To do this, the Forest Service must enter into the Coordination process in good faith knowing that Baker County is an able and willing partner.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment to the Powder River Mining Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

Sincerely,



Bill Harvey, Commission Chair
Baker County Commission