Forest Service

U.S. Department of Agriculture

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To Whom It May Concern:

It has been disheartening, to say the least, that we have not been able to have a say in how our environment is being utilized. Because South32 has set up their mining operations on private land, they have been able to do whatever they want to do. This has been exasperating. Now they are aiming to further expand their destruction into Forest land by 500 acres. It is a devastating and terrifying prospect and brings to mind the old adage “Give an inch and they take a mile.”

South32 has already described how much water they predict to extract in their dewatering of the Patagonia Mountains to reach the materials they need. At a rate of 6.48 million gallons per day, this is a loss we simply cannot sustain ([www.azcentral.com](http://www.azcentral.com)). The treated water will then be dumped into Harshaw Creek where it will affect not only the wildlife that depend on those watering holes but will pollute the town of Patagonia’s Municipal Supply Watershed inside the Coronado National Forest ([www.patagoniaalliance.org](http://www.patagoniaalliance.org)). Groundwater does not stay in one area. It meanders and moves around, and the mine’s waste will cause acid drainage and the leaching of metals will contaminate the soil and water, which will then move to other areas, affecting and polluting this entire ecosystem for generations to come.

The sound and light pollution from the mine is a concern not only for the wildlife who make the Patagonia Mountains and the Sky Islands their home, but it is also a terrible loss for so many residents have been here all their lives, and the hundreds who have recently retired here to enjoy the area’s dark skies, tranquil nights, and varied wildlife. Much of the wildlife in these mountains are endangered species, such as the Mexican Spotted Owl, the Yellow-Billed Cuckoo, and the Jaguar. These mountains are the only place where these rare creatures reside. One would think that our government would do anything possible to ensure their continued existence, but it seems that since this mine showed up, no one is listening to reason. The mine is already creating unforeseeable damage to this area, and now they want to expand the destruction to encompass more acres. This absolutely cannot be allowed to happen.

South32, which spun out of mining giant BHP, in its mere eight years of existence has already wreaked havoc in its home country of Australia, as well as in South Africa and South America. In Australia, South32 abandoned its dendrobium mine expansion project because they were blocked by an Australian planning body citing concerns over the potential irreversible impact on water resources in Sydney (<https://www.mining-technology.com/news/south32-abandons-dendrobium-expansion/>). South32 was ultimately ordered to pay $2.9 million for diverting drinking water over a five-year period to their coal mine without a license (<https://www.mining-technology.com/news/south32-to-pay-fine-for-diverting-water-to-coal-mine/>). In South Africa, a lawsuit has been filed against South32 and BHP on behalf of former mine workers after they contracted incurable lung disease (<https://www.mining-technology.com/news/catholic-church-sues-south32-south-africa-lung-disease/>). In Colombia’s Cerro Matoso nickel mine, South32 was ordered to pay damages to indigenous and Afro-Colombian communities after the mine’s waste emissions seriously affected neighboring communities which caused lung and heart problems, including lung cancer (“Colombia’s Cerro Matoso mine must pay damages to local communities, court rules” [www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com)).

It is incredible to think that we are facing such a dangerous foe, and that this foe wants to get bigger and stronger. We do not want to be another statistic, or a sacrifice zone, or victims of environmental racism. The dangers and risks have been documented. We are begging those with the power and the influence to show foresight. This company should not be allowed to continue their operations at all, let alone to expand them.

I thank you for your time,

Dr. Maritza Rodriguez