Kerwin S. Dewberry, Forest Supervisor

Coronado National Forest   
ATTN: Hermosa Critical Minerals Project   
300 West Congress Street   
Tucson, AZ, 85701

**Subject**: Comment in support of South32’s Hermosa Critical Minerals Exploration and Mine Plan of Operations

Dear Mr. Dewberry,

On behalf of the Southern Arizona Leadership Council (SALC), I am writing to express my support for South32’s Hermosa Critical Minerals Exploration and Mine Plan of Operations. As the only advanced mine development project in the United States poised to produce two federally designated critical minerals, manganese and zinc, both are essential to powering the nation’s clean and secure energy future.

SALC’s 160 CEO and executive business members seek to improve our region and state through economic vitality and opportunity which will lead to improving the quality of life for our communities. One of SALC’s primary areas of focus is infrastructure and we believe this project is critical for the green energy and national security demands of our country.

As our economy becomes more reliant on technology, it is imperative that we have responsible and reliable access to the minerals required. There are significant national security risks embedded in our critical mineral supply chains, and southern Arizona can play a role in mitigating those risks. Most of the minerals needed to preserve our nation’s security are extracted and/or processed by adversaries like China. Geopolitical tensions and global conflicts are on the rise, and America is increasingly vulnerable to sudden and devastating supply changes because others wield power over critical minerals. Manganese, for example, is required for steel and electric vehicles. This mineral is one of five minerals identified in the 2022 Defense Production Act (DPA)— a policy designed to ramp up the development of supply chains for minerals crucial to energy production and national defense. Currently, 100% of our nation’s supply of manganese comes from foreign entities, with 96% of processed high-yield manganese sulfate controlled by China.

SALC’s senior business leaders recognize Hermosa’s potential to bring numerous benefits to Southern Arizona and the entire nation, while also leading change in the industry by utilizing green energy and using the newest mining technology to reduce environmental impact. The United States has some of the most extensive oversight and regulation for mining in the world, both environmentally and with respect to worker safety. This oversight is not occurring in the countries that we currently rely on for our mineral needs.

South32 is partnering with the community to ensure residents’ needs and concerns are addressed as the project moves forward, including for water management, sustainability, and protecting our region’s unique ecosystem. Hermosa is being designed from the ground up with advanced technology and monitoring systems to deliver on the company’s sustainability commitments and to be accountable to the community. With a total footprint of 750 acres, it is a fraction of the size of open-pit and traditional underground mines. Additionally, its water use intensity is 75% less than other mines in the region.

Southern Arizona has the ability to play an important role in America’s national and energy security. We have the opportunity to overcome our foreign dependence and ensure our national defense, all while growing local economies. It’s crucial that we support South32’s investment in the Hermosa Project. Thank you for your consideration as the project’s NEPA process continues. You can contact me at tmaxwell@salc.org with any questions or to discuss this issue in more detail.

Regards,

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Ted Maxwell

President & CEO

Southern Arizona Leadership Council