June 9, 2024

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on the proposed Plan of Operation for the Hermosa Project. As a Patagonia resident, independent thinker and not a joiner of groups, I’ve now had a decade of living with and pondering the impacts of industrial mining on our community and on the Patagonia Mountains.

I’ve organized 118 little nuggets of thought and response into a dozen levels on the enclosed poster, “Digging deeper – for the Ore of Understanding.” These diagrammatic levels are offered as an analytical tool for understanding the impacts any mine. Impacts are in the center column, and the right hand column is about responses and accountability.

In the first ten levels are four important conclusions:

1) - that the communication style of South32 is constantly twisting meaning of language and images for self-promotion, to the extent that every verbal, visual or video item that issues from them needs to have translation into what the “real message” is. Greenwashing is an example, the portrayal of a process or action as highly sustainable when in fact it isn’t. Even the addition of “Critical Mineral” to the title of the Plan of Operation is a twist, an appeal to chauvinistic and nationalistic sentiments in an attempt to get permissions and support based on what seems to many like trumped-up urgency.

2) – that the presence of the corporation in the Patagonia area can be accurately described as corporate colonization, an occupation that has a large emotional cost for the residents of a magical and supportive small community. It includes corporate branding, promises, property and claim acquisition, money spread about in a pretense of philanthropy, even the agressive flying of flags on vehicles. This form of colonization damages or eliminates the scenery, serenity, contact with nature, wildlife and biodiversity that is the major resource of the blossoming nature-based economy growing here. Very few Patagonians actively want to become a sacrifice zone for the purpose of foreign corporate profit. Instead, they wonder about how the colonization will end.

3) - that the global behavior of this company reveal its dark side. Five examples: a multimillion dollar fine in New South Wales for illegal taking of water; a class-action lawsuit beginning in South Africa by hundreds of coal miners suing for permanent respiratory damage; worker health damage around manganese mining in Australia and South Africa (a neurotoxic syndrome called manganism); rejection of the Ambler district access road in Alaska by 11 of 13 affected indigenous communities and by the Biden Administration. Also from the dark side, an end run around the rejection, in New South Wales in 2022, by the State’s planning agency, of a 30-year extension plan for South32’s high-production coal mines. The overriding of the rejection by another NSW department involved the story-writing twist of getting coal defined as a critical mineral because it’s used in steel-making and steel is cleverly being spun into being a labeled critical material itself. Cleverly, the urgency gets ramped up by language like this.

4) -that the company - even as it constantly claims high sustainability and green intentions - is a very large emitter of CO2, when all its mine-related operations are calculated properly as its full carbon footprint. A Patagonia example understandable by all is the growing “tank farm” visible on the Hermosa project tours, tens of thousands of gallons of fuel tanks visible near the guardhouse. These onsite tanks are fed by Senergy tankers seen very frequently in Patagonia, rounding the corners by the US Post Office. At 8,500 gallons each, and 22 pounds of CO2 equivalent gases produced by burning one gallon of diesel fuel, that’s about 187,000 pounds of CO2 contributed to our one earth’s one atmosphere per tanker that goes “up the hill.” That needs to be multiplied by however many tankers of fuel per year the project uses, as a component of the full carbon footprint of the venture.

At the global scale, the company’s NSW coal mines, Appin and Dendrobium, produce about 6 million metric tons a year of coal. At about 7,183 pounds of CO2 per short ton, burning this coal contributes about 39.2 billion pounds per year of CO2. This is not acceptable in an era when humanity is failing to significantly flatten the curve of global atmospheric CO2, the steep end of the famous “hockey stick” curve. The Hermosa Project must be understood as speeding global warming, hastening climate change, and accelerating the scientifically agreed-upon Sixth Mass Extinction. Why is south32 shoveling more coal into the boilers of the sinking Titanic, and being given Federal permission to shovel even faster?

5) The conclusion of Level 11 is that the source of the destructive, crafty and violent behaviors pointed at above, is an economic model called extractive capitalism that’s been called “the death economy.” In this model, earth is seen as a resource to be commodified for profit, and beyond the property lines of so-called private property are free sewage disposal systems in the form of air, water and soil that magically get rid of any waste products a mining effort might generate. Nature disagrees, and Patagonians are more interested in working and consuming under a life-based economic model.

6) The conclusion of Level 12 is that the value systems under the clashing economic models are also at war. On the dark side, profit is seen as the dominant goal of economic activity, human cleverness is greater than that of other lesser creatures, technology can solve all problems, nature is a system to be milked, independence and individual strength are paramount, and planning need only be done for “life of the mine.” On the life-based side, humans are seen as one species among all in a deeply interdependent web of life, Mother nature’s laws set the rules which unalterably govern life, and trying to think for seven generations is wiser than anything less. Humility and gratitude are automatic consequences of knowing and respecting the life force, survival of one is dependent on the survival of all, and abiding contact with nature generates wonder and bottomless joy of life.



I hereby reference and incorporate herein the comments filed by Patagonia Area Resource Association on behalf of multiple organizations.

Thank you for reading this far, it’s gotta be quite a chore for you guys.

The end.