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Comments: Stibnite Gold Project EIS #50516

Natural Ecosystems are precious and should be protected. Once these lands are disturbed, despite plans for restoration and reclamation of the lands, they are not the same. Countless mining projects, particularly open mine projects permanently damage the land. The Montana Environmental Information Center details some of the damages of open mining across Montana. Open mine locations permanently change the landscape. The South Fork of the Salmon River should stay free and wild. The river is not only a beautiful piece of the American west that is enjoyed by hikers, anglers, rafters, and countless other outdoor enthusiasts, but native species. The basin is one of the few remaining rivers that is relatively undisturbed and home to the bull trout, steelhead trout, westslope cutthroat, and chinook salmon (USDA Forest Service). Bull trout were listed as Endangered in 1998 and listed on the Endangered Species Act in 1999 as Threatened (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service). Destroying their natural habitat will push these native fish into extinction. Chinook Salmon were listed as a threatened species in 1992 by the National Marine Fisheries Service (USDA Forest Service). Looking at historical mining, grazing, and roadbuilding in the area shows the devastating impacts these activities have on the native fish populations.

In addition to the permanent environmental damage and potential extinction of endangered and threatened native species, the river is a part of what makes the west wild. Anyone who has grown up in the rural west likely has countless life changing and shaping stories about the impact of the wilderness on them. I spent my childhood and now my adult life exploring the Salmon River and other places that make this part of the world such a gift to work in. People move here and visit here because it is one of the last remaining wild places. Tourism and outdoor recreation are both key industries in Idaho (Idaho Commerce). Protecting the environment will protect tourism and business within Idaho, in turn protecting Idaho families and businesses. An open mine will operate for a few years and then leave; the jobs will not last. If it is protected, the environment will bring tourists for years to come. The environment is precious, protect it! As a concerned citizen and a business professional, I plead that the South Fork of the Salmon River be preserved.

Thank you for your time and consideration.