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Comments: Please see attached comments.

American Whitewater is a national non-profit 501(c)(3) river conservation organization founded in 1954. We have over 6,000 members and 100 local-based affiliate clubs, representing approximately 80,000 whitewater paddlers across the nation. American Whitewater[rsquo]s mission is to conserve and restore America[rsquo]s whitewater resources and to enhance opportunities to enjoy them safely. As a conservation-oriented paddling organization with many members who enjoy paddling Johnson Creek, the East Fork of the South Fork Salmon River, the South Fork Salmon River, and the Main Salmon, American Whitewater has an interest in this proposed mine.

Outdoor Alliance is a coalition of ten member-based organizations representing the human powered outdoor recreation community. The coalition includes Access Fund, American Canoe Association, American Whitewater, International Mountain Bicycling Association, Winter Wildlands Alliance, The Mountaineers, the American Alpine Club, the Mazamas, Colorado Mountain Club, and Surfrider Foundation and represents the interests of the millions of Americans who climb, paddle, mountain bike, backcountry ski and snowshoe, and enjoy coastal recreation on our nation[rsquo]s public lands, waters, and snowscapes.

A significant percentage of American Whitewater members reside within driving distance from this river and many of our members travel great distances to this area for world-class recreation.

Federal actions like those considered here that are expected to affect water quality, stream flow, access to the river, fisheries and fishing, travel safety, and related land and water-based recreation will adversely impact opportunities for American Whitewater members to enjoy the Salmon River and its tributaries downstream of the proposed mine.

Numerous world class whitewater river reaches are downstream of the proposed mine and are hydrologically connected to the mine and its stored tailings. These reaches are described in detail on the American Whitewater website as referenced below and must be included in the scope of analysis. We provide this information and ask that the important values of these reaches be disclosed and discussed in subsequent analysis, and the mining related risks and impacts to these values be weighed in alternative analysis.

A glaring oversight of the DEIS is that the scope of analysis does not include the river reaches downstream of the mine that could be chronically and/or catastrophically impacted by the proposed mine.1 Sections of the East Fork of the South Fork of the Salmon River, the South Fork of the Salmon River, and the main Salmon River are hydrologically connected and downstream of the proposed mine. Thousands of paddlers use these rivers for days or weeks each year, drinking and being significantly exposed to the water. Water quality and other project impacts, both anticipated and unanticipated, on recreational use and fisheries downstream of the proposed project must be considered in this proceeding.

Based on the predicted and potential impacts on outstanding irreplaceable recreational and ecological values of the action alternatives, American Whitewater and Outdoor Alliance request that you adopt Alternative 5, the No Action Alternative. We offer support for this request below.

1. The DEIS fails to adequately address water quality impacts and threats to recreational river values of downstream reaches.

Whitewater paddling involves boaters getting splashed, hitting overhead waves that break over them, flipping

over and rolling back up, and accidental swimming in strong currents. This is especially true and frequent on large and challenging rivers like those flowing downstream of the proposed mine. In addition, recreational swimming and water-play are routine parts of most river trips, especially those involving children and those on the Wild and Scenic Main Salmon River. On river trips with kids, it is impossible to keep kids out of the water or the water out of the kids. During these repeated submersion and splashing events paddlers take untreated river water into their bodies through their mouths, noses, ears, eyes, and any cuts or scrapes they may have. In addition, during multi-day river trips, paddlers drink river water, and often solely river water, that is treated chemically or through filtration. Cumulatively over a multi-day trip, or many in a season, the water entering paddlers[rsquo] bodies can add up to significant amounts.

The DEIS is largely silent on the impacts of the proposed mine on downstream water consumption and contact. For example, according to the DEIS, several action alternatives are anticipated to significantly increase arsenic levels in the East Fork of the South Fork of the Salmon River, to as much as 13 times the federal drinking water standard of 0.01mg/L.2 We request that further analysis be conducted on potential health impacts of anticipated water quality impacts on downstream recreational visitors. In addition, there are likely unacknowledged risks associated with potential accidents at the mine site that could catastrophically impact water quality through release of untreated water over the long term or in a single event. The potential impacts of accidental pollution releases should be fully analyzed.

2. The DEIS fails to adequately address fisheries impacts and threats and the impacts on downstream recreational values.

Fishing on the South Fork and the Main Salmon River is a cherished facet of recreational visits to these river reaches and includes fishing for consumption in the backcountry. The Forest Plan recognizes this value: [ldquo]The SFSR has an important anadromous fishery and is tributary to the Salmon River. The SFSR segments provide major spawning and rearing habitat for anadromous species. The river supports wild summer Chinook salmon and wild steelhead trout. This population of steelhead includes some of the largest individuals in North America. The river also supports bull trout and westslope cutthroat trout.[rdquo]3

The intrinsic cultural and recreational value of the fisheries habitat in this watershed is hard to overstate. This is especially true over the long term, during which future dam removals downstream could welcome more fish to the watershed, or alternately unrelenting impacts could further stress species already profoundly threatened. The NEPA analysis must take a broader view, both spatially and temporally, to consider the risks the proposed mining activity poses on these irreplaceable fish and their habitat.

3. Risks and impacts to the Wild and Scenic Main Salmon River must be fully disclosed, analyzed, and weighed by the Forest Service, and these risks and impacts merit rejection of all action alternatives.

The Main Salmon, from Corn Creek to Vinegar Creek, provides a cherished week-long river trip through a spectacular canyon.4 The reach is federally designated and protected as a Wild and Scenic River for its recreational and other values, and demand for the experience is so great that a lottery-based permit system limits the number of river trips. Paddlers enjoy camping on large beaches and benches scattered with ponderosa pines. The river is full of moderate-difficulty rapids, providing for exciting family-friendly rafting. Visitors often swim in the river and use river water for drinking, cooking, and cleaning dishes. Multiple commercial outfitters run trips on the river, and the economies of communities both upstream and downstream of the reach benefit from river-related tourism. The South Fork Salmon River joins the main Salmon in this reach, flowing with waters that originate, in part, in the East Fork South Fork Salmon watershed and include the waters flowing through and from the proposed mine.

Upon emerging from the Wilderness, the Salmon River flows through two roadside sections, Vinegar Creek to Riggins,5 and Riggins to Whitebird.6 These reaches offer commercial rafting trips, excellent freestyle kayaking,

and nice day-trips for paddlers visiting the area. In addition to paddling, these reaches are popular for fishing and riverside camping.

Near Whitebird, the Salmon leaves the road once again and enters an arid and rugged canyon often referred to as the Lower Salmon.7 This reach offers paddlers an excellent three to five-day river trip with camping on large beaches, swimming in relatively warm water, and there are no lottery-based permit limits on recreational use. The Lower Salmon has been found suitable for Wild and Scenic designation for its recreational and other values, following recognition by Congress as a study river. The river is managed similar to a designated river for protection of its free-flowing character, water quality, and outstandingly remarkable values, under direction from Congress.8

Section 3.23.2.1 of the DEIS wrongly excludes the Salmon River from the scope of analysis, incorrectly limiting the Wild and Scenic analysis to rivers and study corridors [ldquo]intersecting[rdquo] with the Stibnite Gold Project area. Accordingly, Section 4.23.2 of the DEIS includes no mention or analysis of impacts and risks to the Salmon River, even though impacts to its upstream tributaries are acknowledged, including increased sedimentation, potential for oil and gas spills, fisheries impacts, and others.

Eliminating the Salmon River is arbitrary and capricious in that it ignores the basic fact that water from the mine flows unimpeded downstream to the Salmon River, and anadromous and other fish freely move upstream and downstream between the proposed mine and the Salmon River. Water quality and fish are protected outstandingly remarkable values of the Wild and Scenic Salmon River, and anticipated impacts and potential accidents in the mining project area will inevitably move downstream and affect the Salmon River.

The Main Salmon[rsquo]s protections stem directly from the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, and are integrated into the Salmon Wild and Scenic River Management Plan9 and several Forest Plans. Throughout this regulatory framework runs the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act Section 10(a) mandate that the Forest Service protect and enhance the values which caused the Salmon

River to be included in the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System: scenery, recreation, geology, fish, wildlife, water quality, botany, prehistory, history, and cultural traditional use. Without including the Salmon River in its Wild and Scenic analysis for the proposed actions, there is no basis for determining whether or not the Forest Service is meeting the fundamental protect and enhance standard under the law.

Section 7(a) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act prohibits the Forest Service from [ldquo]assist[ing] by loan, grant, license, or otherwise in the construction of any water resources project that would have a direct and adverse effect on the values for which such river was established, as determined by the Secretary charged with its administration. Specific to tributaries, Section 7(a) prohibits water resource projects that would [ldquo]unreasonably diminish the scenic, recreational, and fish and wildlife values present in the area on the date of designation of a river as a component of the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System.[rdquo] Section 10(d) of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act further clarifies agency authority to protect the values of designated and study rivers.

The proposed mine includes a 240-foot-tall dam that will eventually be raised to 460 feet tall, which will create a reservoir filled with a pond of water, toxic chemicals, and tailings.10 To be clear, the proposed Tailings Storage Facility is a water resource project, formed by the second tallest dam in Idaho. The risks to the Wild and Scenic Salmon River associated with failure or even relatively minor leaks are significant, and merit rejection of the action alternatives. Failure of this dam would be catastrophic for irreplaceable fish and recreational resources in one of the wildest watersheds remaining in the lower 48 states. The DEIS contains evidence that tailings ponds do fail, as disclosed in Section 3.2.3.9, but we fail to find a hard look at these risks and what the results of failure would be in the DEIS.

4. Risks and Impacts to the Wild and Scenic Suitable South Fork of the Salmon River must be fully disclosed, analyzed, and weighed by the Forest Service, and merit rejection of all action alternatives.

The South Fork of the Salmon River is one of our nation[rsquo]s premier multi-day whitewater rivers.11 Paddlers typically spend 2-5 days descending the river[rsquo]s remote gorge. At low flows characteristic of early spring, late summer, and fall, the river provides a scenic and technical Class III(IV) paddling experience. Medium flows provide a delightful Class IV run. At high flows the South Fork offers some of the best big-water paddling on the continent, attracting paddlers from across the United States and beyond. No matter the flow, paddlers are treated to solitude, superb scenery, excellent fishing, backcountry camping, and an excellent whitewater paddling experience. The lack of a lottery-based permit system allows paddlers to opportunistically enjoy the South Fork with ease and predictability, while many other multi-day runs are off limits to paddlers unsuccessful in lottery-based permit systems.

The Payette National Forest has rightly found 63 miles of the South Fork suitable for Wild and Scenic designation. The Forest has found [ldquo][t]he 63 miles of the South Fork Salmon River within the administrative boundary of the Payette NF are worthy of recognition within the National Wild and Scenic River System. This river segment represents a premier example of a river with outstandingly remarkable values (FEIS, Appendix J). As a major tributary to the already designated Salmon River, the South Fork supports whitewater recreation opportunities, supports populations of anadromous fish, contains some of the most remarkable cultural and historic properties in Idaho, and has outstanding geological and botanical features through the river corridor.[rdquo]12

The Forest[rsquo]s Wild and Scenic Eligibility findings further bolster the river[rsquo]s unique values protected under the Forest Plan. [ldquo]The SFSR has outstanding white-water boating and nationally recognized fishing opportunities during premier steelhead and chinook salmon seasons. The river corridor also provides recreation opportunities that include hunting, hiking, camping, and snowmobiling. The many hot springs along the river corridor are beautiful and provide the visitor with a remote soaking experience.[rdquo]13

Goal WSGO01 in the Payette National Forest Plan requires the Forest to [ldquo]Manage river segments that are eligible or suitable for potential addition to the National Wild and Scenic Rivers System to meet the requirement of the Wild and Scenic River Act,[rdquo] and Objective WSOB01 requires the Forest to [ldquo]Emphasize the following in managing eligible and suitable Wild and Scenic Rivers: a) Maintaining or enhancing the outstandingly remarkable values; b) Maintaining the free-flowing character; c) Maintaining or enhancing values compatible with the assigned classification; and d) Accommodating public use and enjoyment consistent with retaining the river[rsquo]s natural values.[rdquo]14 These plan components stem from Sections 5, 7, and 10 of the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act.

For the same water quality, fisheries, and recreation-related reasons described above regarding the Salmon River, the proposed mine would impact and risk the Wild and Scenic values of the South Fork Salmon River that the Forest Service is required to protect based in large part on the Forest Plan. The proposed mine threatens to severely impact the recreational and fisheries outstanding remarkable values of the river, in direct contravention of WSOB01. Indeed, the action alternatives, rather than emphasizing the protection of these values, instead emphasize resource extraction that poses significant risk to the values.

5. Risks and impacts to the Wild and Scenic eligible Burntlog Creek and Johnson Creek must be fully disclosed, analyzed, and weighed by the Forest Service, and merit rejection of all action alternatives.

While the DEIS largely ignores risks and impacts to downstream reaches, this is not the case with the Wild and Scenic eligible Burntlog Creek and Johnson Creek. For these two protected streams, the DEIS outlines impacts associated with the action alternatives that are clearly incompatible with the streams[rsquo] protected status. In addition, the DEIS overlooks or wrongly finds that some impacts will not occur. Section 4.23.2.7 of the DEIS

summarizes and discloses anticipated impacts to these streams including:

Burntlog Creek

* Water quality impacts caused by increased sedimentation from Burntlog Route construction, winter maintenance, and increased traffic from heavy vehicles. (Alternatives 1, 2, 3)
* Fish ORV [ldquo]may be[rdquo] impacted by increased sedimentation (Alternatives 1, 2, 3)
* Wild and Recreational classifications would be impacted by noise and visual impacts (Alternatives 1, 2, 3)

Johnson Creek

* Water quality impacts (increased sedimentation) caused by heavy vehicle traffic (Alternative 4)
* Heritage ORV impacted by historic transmission line replacement (all action alternatives).

In addition to these disclosed impacts, all action alternatives include predicted and yet-unassessed need for culvert replacement, bridge replacement, and road prism construction or alteration, all of which are likely to alter the free-flowing nature and water quality of these eligible streams. Any of these actions on a designated Wild and Scenic River would require a Wild and Scenic River Act Section 7 analysis to determine whether the changes would impair the free-flowing character of the river. In fact, the DEIS[rsquo]s descriptions of the proposed actions (including the use of bypass channels) clearly indicate that the actions would permanently alter the shape and structure of the riverbed and affect the river[rsquo]s free-flowing character. The DEIS does not contain sufficient information to serve as a Section 7 analysis, and the conclusions of the DEIS finding that none of the alternatives would impact the free-flowing character of the eligible streams are incorrect, arbitrary, and capricious.

Also undisclosed, the impacts to recreation on these streams are largely unaccounted for. Noise, dust, heavy traffic, land clearing, road improvements, water quality impacts, streambed alteration, and fisheries impacts will dramatically alter the recreational values of these streams that could one day contribute to a Wild and Scenic designation. This NEPA analysis must reconsider the impacts of the action alternatives on the recreational values of these streams associated with paddling, fishing, sightseeing, and other uses.

Lastly, in an error systemic to the DEIS, disclosed and anticipated impacts to water quality and fisheries impacts to Burntlog Creek are not also recognized in Johnson Creek, which is downstream and hydrologically connected to Burntlog Creek. The pollution and sedimentation associated with winter use of the Burntlog Route and other activities will flow downstream into Johnson Creek. Impacts to fisheries in Burntlog Creek will also impact the fisheries and recreation values of Johnson Creek. It is scientifically flawed to assume pollution and other impacts to Burntlog Creek will somehow stop at the confluence with Johnson Creek.

As stated above, Goal WSGO01 in the Payette National Forest Plan requires the Forest to manage eligible streams [ldquo]to meet the requirement of the Wild and Scenic River Act.[rdquo] Objective WSOB01 requires the Forest to emphasize [ldquo]a) Maintaining or enhancing the outstandingly remarkable values; b) Maintaining the free-flowing character; c) Maintaining or enhancing values compatible with the assigned classification; and d) Accommodating public use and enjoyment consistent with retaining the river[rsquo]s natural values.[rdquo]15 The action alternatives would directly violate these Forest Plan components.

The DEIS states that [ldquo]Under the WSR Act, impacts to ORVs of eligible waterways would trigger WSR suitability studies for those waterways,[rdquo]16 and these studies would need to find the streams unsuitable for Wild and Scenic designation prior to adoption of an action alternative.

Regardless of what the Agency calls this [ldquo]suitability[rdquo] process, the basic nature of it is a means of stripping Forest Plan protections from potential Wild and Scenic streams so that those streams can be degraded, quite possibly to the point that they are no longer viable candidates for designation.

At a minimum, prior to a successful Forest Plan amendment stripping Wild and Scenic eligibility protections from these streams, the action alternatives are all prohibited by the Forest Plan and must be rejected as such, and the No Action alternative must be selected.

Further, we assert that the Forest Service[rsquo]s proposed release process is not legal or appropriate. The 2012 Forest Planning Rule is clear that forest plans and amendments should:

1) Find rivers eligible, and 2) Protect eligible streams.17 There is no basis in the Planning Rule

for stripping protections from eligible streams through forest plan amendments. To use the Forest[rsquo]s word, there is no provision allowing for [ldquo]suitability[rdquo] determinations to be made as part of the forest plan amendment process.

Beyond the regulatory and legal issues with the Forest Service proposed process, we disagree with the idea that the protective commitments made in the Forest Plan should be

second-guessed or removed. These streams have nationally significant fisheries and recreational values that should be protected, especially given their direct connection and effect on downstream river reaches that span hundreds of miles of vital (and designated critical) habitat for rare, threatened, and endangered species and irreplaceable whitewater paddling opportunities. We are confident that any rigorous analysis of these streams will find that their protection is merited and incompatible with the action alternatives.

6. Risks and Impacts to the East Fork of the South Fork of the Salmon River must be fully disclosed, analyzed, and weighed by the Forest Service, and merit rejection of all action alternatives.

The East Fork of the South Fork of the Salmon is an outstanding whitewater river featuring massive waves, continuous rapids, excellent water quality and fishing, good camping, and easy access. Paddlers often travel to the East Fork valley to camp and paddle several rivers, including the East Fork, Secesh River, Johnson Creek, and the South Fork Salmon. Two sections of the East Fork of the South Fork are commonly paddled: Vibika Creek to Johnson Creek18, and Johnson Creek to South Fork Salmon River.19 The latter is downstream of the proposed mine and impacts to water quality, and fisheries, and recreation were inadequately analyzed in the DEIS. Many of the predicted impacts to Burntlog and Johnson creeks that are disclosed in the DEIS would have direct effects on this downstream reach.

7. All comments and letters must be accepted and given due consideration

American Whitewater and Outdoor Alliance strive to connect public land visitors and enthusiasts with Forest Service staff, in order to improve and inform the decision-making process and outcomes. To accomplish this we help the Forest Service solicit and collect comment letters from individuals the Agency may otherwise fail to reach and hear from. Our preference and typical practice is to help individuals submit comments via email, however on this project no email address was provided for submissions. With requests for an email address denied, we gathered letters to submit in a batch. Unacceptably, Forest Service public affairs staff indicated via email, on the comment deadline, that gathered letters need to be submitted separately to have the authors and their associated comments considered together as standalone cohesive comment letters. This determination, which we fundamentally disagree with, conflicts with the NEPA Project comment page for the project which advises (but does not require) separate letters be submitted separately, and states that batches [ldquo]may not be numbered the way the submitters have anticipated.[rdquo]20 It is unclear what [ldquo]numbered[rdquo] means, but it does not mean in plain language or in any reasonable interpretation that letter content will be separated from letter authors. We have the expectation that comment letters submitted together as a batch will be counted and considered as separate individual comment letters. To do otherwise would diminish the quality of

information the agency is basing decisions on, limit follow up opportunities, lose important contextual information, violate the public trust, would be unreasonable, and would

conflict with federal law and Agency policy and practice. We request all letters, submitted in a batch or otherwise, be counted and considered as individual comment letters.

8. Conclusion: Request for Selection of Alternative 5 (No Action)

Only one alternative in the DEIS would uphold the Forest Service[rsquo]s legal mandate to protect designated, suitable, and eligible Wild and Scenic Rivers: the No Action Alternative. All of the action alternatives would have significant impacts to these rivers, the threatened and endangered species that depend on these rivers, and the many Americans who seek solace and recreation on these rivers. This is simply not the place for a massive mining operation with significant perpetual impacts and risks. Please select Alternative 5.

1 See improper scope of analysis excluding downstream river reaches at DEIS: 3.1-1

2 See standard at: https://www.epa.gov/dwreginfo/chemical-contaminant-rules and arsenic summary by alternative at DEIS: Pg. ES-25

3 See Wild and Scenic Suitability Report, J-33.
https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5196592.pdf

4 See https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/view/?#/river-detail/612/main

5 See: https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/view/?#/river-detail/1464/main

6 See: https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/view/?#/river-detail/613/main

7 See: https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/view/?#/river-detail/614/main

8 See: https://www.blm.gov/visit/lower-salmon-river

9 See: https://www.rivers.gov/documents/plans/salmon-middle-salmon-plan.pdf

10 See: DEIS 2.3.5.7.Pgs. 2-33 - 2-37.

11 See: https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/view/?#/river-detail/621/main

12 2003 Payette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, Record of Decision. ROD-12. 13 See Wild and Scenic Suitability Report, J-34.
https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5196592.pdf

14 2003 Payette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, Record of Decision. Chapter 3: Management Area Description and Direction, Pg. III-75

15 2003 Payette National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, Record of Decision. Chapter 3: Management Area Description and Direction, Pg. III-75

16 See DEIS, 4.23-44

17 See 2012 Forest Planning Rule [sect] 219.10(b)(v).

18 See: https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/view/?#/river-detail/616/main

19 See: https://www.americanwhitewater.org/content/River/view/?#/river-detail/615/main

20 See: https://cara.ecosystem-management.org/Public//CommentInput?Project=50516