

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 10/28/2020 6:00:00 AM

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Comments: My Name is James Baker and I have been a Washington State resident for over twenty years. I work for the United States Forest Service as a Forestry Technician and have spent the majority of my life engaging in the wild landscapes of the American West. Today, I write in opposition of the Stibnite mining project proposal on the South Fork of the Salmon River. I understand that you, as the person tasked with reading this letter, likely encounter many generic and repetitive comment letters centered around environmental concerns. With that in mind I will only bring up one salient concern (although I have many) that in my mind, discredits the viability of this mining project.

First however, I introduce the framework through which I understand this situation: it is one of risk-aversion. Just like any other political decision, the Stibnite mining project is accompanied by inherent risks. Risk of pollution, habitat degradation, economic disruption, lawsuits etc. In some cases, the risks involved with a particular decision are negligible compared to the commensurate benefits. In others, the risks are too high to warrant further action. In this case the risks of not proceeding are a loss of profit for Midas Mining Inc and a mining site in need of reclamation.

As I mentioned before, the only issue I will be discussing is that of fish habitat volatility. As an angler, I am well aware of the rapidly diminishing Steelhead and Salmon returns on the Salmon River. I am an advocate of dam removal and have dedicated countless hours to the cause of restoring and improving fish habitat. I firmly believe that the risk of degrading fish habitat over the next two decades outweighs any opportunity for corporate profit. Even with the promise of mine reclamation, the twenty years of open-pit extraction and chemical leaching are accompanied by an unreasonable level of risk and uncertainty. I ask you to refer to the Proposed Action Intrinsic Potential Model to get a good grasp on this issue. As it states on page 319 of Appendix J, [ldquo]Over the life of the mine (baseline to post-closure), the amount of high-rated Chinook salmon IP habitat would decrease by 489 meters (58.3 percent). There is no scenario in which I would be willing to risk the health and productivity of Chinook salmon as such, and frankly it would be unethical for someone to accept such a risk. A habitat decrease of 58% would be a fatal blow to an already struggling species. How would the character of this river change following such a reduction in salmonid habitat? Is that good stewardship? No, it isn[rsquo]t.

If I had more time and a wider audience I would mention many other instances of injustice and gross land management malpractice recorded within this draft environmental impact statement. This project is wrong for Idaho, wrong for the Columbia river gorge/basin, and wrong for the health of our non-human counterparts. I do not support further mining in the Stibnite/south fork region.