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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Regarding the Hermosa Critical Minerals Project

Scoping Comments & Environmental Impact Statement

Dear Supervisor Dewberry:

Our family owns the Circle Z Ranch, an operating dude ranch in Patagonia, Arizona, bringing significant tourism to the Patagonia area since 1926. On behalf of our business and our guests, we thank the Coronado National Forest Service for the opportunity to submit our scoping comments on the cultural, historical, economic and business impacts the Hermosa Projects' proposed Permanent Access Route and above ground high voltage transmission line.

INTRODUCTION:

Established in 1926, Circle Z Ranch is one of Arizona's original Dude Ranches and the origins of the now flourishing nature-based tourism in our community. Our family purchased the ranch in 1975, at a time when the copper mining industry abandoned mines in this area, leaving behind toxic mine tailings, open mines shafts and mine adits in their wake. Our land borders USFS to the east, Arizona State Parks land to the south, and Nature Conservancy land to the west. Since our purchase of the ranch, we continue our commitment to preserving this piece of the Sky Islands with a perpetual conservation easement through the Arizona Land and Water Trust. Our dude ranch is a tourist destination serving over 500 people each year during our October to April Guest Season. We have safely guided horseback riding trips from our established trails on our private lands as well as those leading onto the bordering CNFS lands under a Special Use Permit, granted in 1992. We are currently in our 4th year of our current issued 10 year permit.

We maintain that our Dude Ranch operations will be significantly and foreseeably impacted by the Hermosa Projects' requested 100 foot wide easement for a Permanent Access Route and the proposed High Voltage Transmission Line on FS 4653 between 3-R Canyon and Flux Canyon Road. These will have a foreseeable impact on the economic viability of our business, on our neighboring land conservation efforts, on our historical use of this strip of land, will create profound visual pollution, and will invariably impact our overall land values.

HISTORIC USE OF LAND FOR HERITAGE TRAILS:

The Mine's requested easement area has historically been used by our ranch for riding trails and by the T-4 Ranch for cattle grazing. Due to the area's difficult terrain, this small section of land has not been accessible by motor vehicles excepting the occasional use for gas line administrative operations. This easement would transect 10 of our established and frequently used riding trails, making them unsafe for use. These are riding trails for which we have well-established use for over 90 years. The easement would also indirectly impact our trails on our conservation land, with visual impacts related to the road and 100 foot tall transmission lines, noise from haul trucks, and a severe disruption in the enjoyment of this area by our guests.

Because of the steepness, deep arroyos, and rock formations in this area, diverting our trails would be impossible. We have worked for years to keep these trails maintained and passable for our horses and for the enjoyment of our guests.

ECONOMIC VIABILITY OF OUR BUSINESS:

Over our 48 years of ownership, we have marketed our dude ranch around our historic ability to ride into the open and pristine spaces adjacent to our property. Our ranch brings hundreds of tourists to this area yearly, with an average stay at our ranch of seven days. Absent the ability to continue our historic use of this pristine and quiet area, we would suffer a significant economic impact on our business as these trails are contiguous and

integral to our riding program; 70% of our business being from repeat guests. We would lose the option to attract guests to the open spaces that have been our signature offering. We ask the forest service conduct an analysis on the foreseeable economic impact to our business through loss of guests.

The proposed PAR (see map Appendix A) is along what the Hermosa Project is calling a USFS Road but is, in fact, a rarely utilized two-track for gas line administrative purposes. Having a PAR and visible power lines would impact the quality of this natural setting that has historically had very low impact usage.

CONSERVATION VALUES

We have a conservation easement on 3600 acres of land that borders the area in question. Our ability to preserve this space into perpetuity will be greatly impacted with the 24/7 operations of the mine's ore trucks skirting along the border between our properties. With this conservation easement, we gave up our development rights because of our family's commitment to preserving this pristine, visually stunning, and inherently valuable protection zone for the watershed of Sonoita Creek. We ask that an analysis be done on the cumulative effects to the inherent future protections to the water source for Sonoita Creek.

Our conservation efforts also include the purchase of the 3-R Mine, which we placed under a conservation easement with the ADEQ, giving up our rights for mineral exploration. We have since partnered with the ADEQ to secure a Federal Grant for cleaning up the toxic mine tailings, closing the open shafts, and closing the old adits. These efforts have had a dramatic and positive impact on the health of Sonoita Creek, which is in the Patagonia Mountains watershed. We received nothing in return, except for the ability to conduct ourselves in the most conservation-oriented manner to protect this biologically diverse area.

The PAR would require the construction of large bridges, along with the cutting and filling of natural arroyos and canyons. The construction phase would likely involve blasting and the use of heavy equipment, and would have numerous adverse impacts related to noise, air pollution, disruption of habitat, and visual pollution on USFS lands. There are several endemic plant species, listed as endangered by NatureServe, in this area and we ask the forest service to complete a thorough botanical analysis and the effect of a major road on these species.

LAND VALUES

We believe that our land values, already willingly decreased with the conservation easement, will suffer significant harm. Marketing a conservation property to a community of real estate conservation buyers with a large ore hauling road on its borders would be imminently impossible. We ask that the Forest Service do an analysis of the impact of this road to the economic valuation of our conservation land.

There is also the concern of erosional impacts on our land in being adjacent and downhill to such a massive and high impact road. We ask the Forest Service to conduct an analysis on the erosional affects of a high intensity use road.

CULTURAL IMPACTS

The USFS must carefully comply with all laws, orders, and policies related to heritage management and Tribal consultation, its obligations including but not limited to public lands. The Patagonia valley and Patagonia Mountains are the ancestral homelands of several present-day descendant communities, abundant in petroglyphs, inhabited and decorated caves, pictographs, metates and cupules, remnant objects, habitation structures, and medicine collection/processing places. It is of note that many of these sites are visibly correlated with the Patagonia Mountains, often located in inconvenient or less suitable locations as to have the clearest view of the mountains. The mountains should be managed in toto as a property of traditional cultural importance (TCP) even in the absence of physical archaeology (such as ritual pilgrimage locations, sacred places, and areas where medicines were gathered) as mandated by Sec 101 of NHPA. It is also of note that the NRHP calls for the protection of all places eligible for inclusion, and many Indigenous heritage sites, adversely affected by mining operations, would likely be deemed eligible under Criterion C & D. Changes in the local environment; the degradation of viewsheds, the loss of culturally significant plants sometimes correlated with springs or otherwise impacted by changes in groundwater; changes in access (such as creating or improving roads) that may proliferate vandalism, looting, surface collecting, or otherwise providing a "launching point" for OHV users to create illegally pioneered trails accessing archaeology; and desecration to the mountain itself are all significant

adverse impacts. In addition, Tribal consultation should include disclosure of these features, including these mentioned herein.

BIOLOGICAL AND BOTANICAL IMPACTS

The Patagonia Mountains are one of the most unique and spectacular of Sky Island phenomena, hosting federally-endangered Mexican spotted owls; the federally-endangered *Graptopetalum bartramii*, a fall-blooming succulent, found in the Patagonias where it earns its common name, The Patagonia Mountain Leather-petal; *Cynanchum ligulatum*, also known as Mexican swallow-wort, listed as critically imperiled by NatureServe; *Vaejovis patagonia*, a small brown scorpion found nowhere else in the world but the Patagonia Mountains, observed in August 2023 being crushed by mining trucks; *Pseudouroctonus santarita*, another rare scorpion found only in the Patagonias and Santa Ritas; *Gagea arizonica*, the Arizona lip-fern, observed for the first time in the Patagonias in late 2023; and the extremely sensitive Patagonia eyed silkworm. Lower in the mountains, where transportation corridors are currently projected, *Metastelma mexicanum* and *Amsonia grandiflora* can be seen growing in areas that would likely be destroyed. Both are imperiled, according to NatureServe. It stands to reason that much of the biology of the Patagonia Mountains is spectacular, unique, and little understood. Many other endangered species, not mentioned here, are likely to occur in the area, or could occur in the future for species dependent upon intact forests, such as we've seen with jaguars and ocelots in neighboring Sky Island communities-if not already present in the Patagonias. A thorough investigation by the USFS is necessary to prevent significant impacts to at-risk species known and unknown, particularly (but not restricted to) surface springs (or near surface), perennial water sources, and other areas likely to be impacted by changes in groundwater and waterborne pollutants. USFS must also address impacts to Sonoita Creek, a vital resource for uncountable species, and all other impacted surface and ground water resources.

RISK OF FIRES

An above ground High Voltage Transmission Line would be a potential fire risk in this native grasslands area. Our property and environs regularly receive high gusting winds which can knock over trees, and potentially power lines.

VISUAL POLLUTION

Our property looks over the pristine grasslands and jutting mountain ranges of the Patagonia Mountains. With these vistas, our property is regularly used for photography shoots and back drops for high-paying film production. Our trails are widely known as the most scenic in Arizona, which would not be the case with towers and ore roads. We ask the forest service to analyze the visual disturbance this will cause to our property and business interests.

VIABLE ALTERNATIVES

The Hermosa Project has several alternate routes that would be acceptable to us, to the Town of Patagonia Council, the SCC County Supervisor Bruce Bracker and the County Manager. The alternate Lochiel Route would use the already established and maintained USFS Road 49, which leads directly out from the Hermosa Project on the South side, and onto the already established and maintained FS Road 49. The route would then have 2 options: entering onto Highway 82 near to the airport by way of FS Road 61 or potentially a reopening of the Lochiel border crossing for transport to Mexico, where the ore will need to go for processing. (see Appendix B) We ask the Forest Service to conduct an analysis of the viability of each alternate route. We feel it is imperative that the route chosen be of minimal impact to the Scenic Highway 82, as thousands of tourists and local citizens drive this highway daily to access services, recreate at lake Patagonia, and view the scenic vistas that is at the heart of this area.

We ask the Forest Service to consider the burying of the high voltage transmission line along its entirety, or moving it to follow the Duquene Road as an alternative to the visual pollution and fire danger imposed by an above ground source. Also, requiring the mine to use Renewal Energy Solar Power to boost their energy needs would go far in making this a truly sustainable operation. Alternatively, bringing the power from Patagonia and up Harshaw road, would provide a more direct link to the mine, as opposed to crossing the scenic and undisturbed

vista. This could potentially be done through the SSVE Coop, which serves the north and east portions of Santa Cruz County.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment and look forward to providing more information in the future. Please include me in any and all future correspondence and notices regarding this project.