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Title:

Comments: I am writing this letter to voice my opposition to the proposal to authorize exploratory drilling and subsequent reclamation within the San Rafael Valley watershed. As you may be aware, this valley and the surrounding mountain ranges comprise a unique and fragile eco-system. My fear is the delicate balance required for the water shed to remain healthy will be irreparably damaged by the proposed mining operations.

Specifically, my concerns are:

Impacts to water quality and quantity

The San Rafael Valley watershed is the headwaters of the Santa Cruz River, one of the last free flowing rivers in southern Arizona. Mining operation's consumption of the aquifer's water has the potential to negatively affect local wells, cattle operations, the 19 endangered and threatened species and the Santa Cruz River headwaters.

Mining activity has the potential to contaminate the watershed through the release of metals into the watershed.

Impacts to endangered and threatened species and other wildlife

The watershed is home to numerous endangered and threatened species. It is an important riparian area and is noted for its biodiversity. Mining operations, with all of its associated impacts, would negatively affect this unique wildlife habitat.

Economic Impacts

Mining operations will negatively affect existing ranching operations through impacts to the water quality and quantity and potentially destroying grazing allotments.

As a result of the effects of mining, the watershed will no longer be a premiere area for recreational activities. People, and their associated positive economic impact, will look to other places to recreate.

Recreational Impacts

The watershed is a unique area where people can enjoy a multitude of recreational activities such as biking, hiking, camping, hunting and birding. Mining operations will use up to 60 square miles of this land preventing it from being used by the general public.

By the very nature of mining activities, with its multitude of associated environmental impacts, will turn the watershed into an undesirable place to recreate.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my concerns. Please consider the potentially devastating impacts mining would have on this important, unique and fragile watershed when evaluating the proposal to authorize exploratory drilling and subsequent reclamation within the San Rafael Valley watershed.

Respectfully,

Pete Rittenger