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Comments: I am a PhD natural resource economist, a partner at a firm leading projects evaluating the benefits and costs of various natural resource management decisions for state and federal agencies. I have led economic studies for a range of projects for USEPA, USDOJ, USDA, USFS, BLM, Bureau of Reclamation, NOAA, Idaho Department of Lands, and others. I have served as an economic expert witness for USDOJ on environmental matters, and I have taught graduate-level economics courses and published studies on environmental economics in peer-reviewed journals and edited volumes. I have also authored guidance documents for federal agencies regarding economic analysis for public policy.

I am also a kayaker, and paddled the South Fork of the Salmon just this year in 2020. I have kayaked all over the world, and these days between my career and business as well as my family, I am able to do only one major kayak trip a year. I live in Oregon, and my friends (a group of medical doctors) and I traveled to the SF Salmon for our one trip this year during June, and could not have enjoyed the trip more. One friend, an anesthesiologist, has been looking at buying land now in the vicinity of the SF Salmon he loved it so much.

From my experience with resource management decisions, local and regional economic impacts of resource extraction projects, and comparisons to management that prioritizes conservation of resources with high and unique recreation and ecological values, I feel confident arguing that protection of the South Fork of the Salmon will have long-term greater benefits for society than a gold mine. The SF Salmon is a rare and increasingly scarce resource. Opportunities for multiple days of river travel in a remote, wilderness setting with water and rapid quality of this level, cannot easily be found anywhere in the world. This type of opportunity can be the highlight of someone's year, as it was for my friends and myself, and have long-lasting mental and physical health benefits. It influences where we choose to live, locate our businesses, and hire (and retain) skilled and productive people. Extensive data increasingly show the importance of these resources and amenities for the decisions that households and businesses make these days, particularly in the West, and it is the most important comparative advantage to the Idaho State economy.

Furthermore, gold and gold-mining opportunities are not scarce in the sense of the value they contribute to society as a whole. Gold has market value, but as a store and proxy for other activities that generate value. Yes some gold is used in industrial, medical, and technological applications, but the majority is as store of value and for jewelry: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/299609/gold-demand-by-industry-sector-share/>. These are not critically important services to the communities of Idaho and arguably the entire basis for the value of gold is based on its rarity. So to some extent increasing the supply just devalues other gold in the world. Most other resource uses from public lands have at least a bit more instrumental, direct value they can provide. In sum there is very little evidence that increasing the supply of gold provides a net welfare gain to society.

And the foreign and highly-specialized nature of the business and workforce employed in gold mining is not conducive to long-term economic development opportunities or impacts for Idaho. Whereas decisions for business owners and skilled workers, such as from the technology sector that can increasingly locate wherever they choose, are much more likely to do so. A massive gold mine with toxic effects for one of the most iconic rivers in the state and all the access, benefit, and visibility it offers downstream on the main Salmon River as well, would only taint and reduce the image of Idaho and its attraction. All trends show in the medium to long term, Idaho is better served protecting its most important rivers rather than putting them at risk for short-term economic gains that are primarily exported and captured by businesses from outside the region.

In addition, the water quality, water supply, and aquatic habitat benefits throughout the Salmon, Snake, and ultimately Columbia Rivers are of increasing importance every year. We as a society spend billions of dollars

annually to compensate for lost habitat from dams downstream, to clean rivers and treat water, and to develop new water supplies throughout Idaho, Oregon, and Washington in areas hydrologically connected to the Salmon River. The uncertainties and risks posed by toxic and destructive activities in this watershed cannot be fully measured.

In summary I strongly argue for making all resource decisions that affect the quality of the Salmon River and the South Fork in particular with a priority on the long-term, society-wide benefits of an ecologically-healthy and preserved place.