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First name: Patrick

Last name: Baird

Organization:

Title:

Comments: To Whom It May Concern:

Hello, my name is Patrick Baird. I am a public high school biology and environmental science teacher living in Enterprise, Oregon approximately 100 miles to the northwest of the proposed Stibnite Mining District. I am also a passionate whitewater and wilderness river trip enthusiast. I have spent the majority of my adult life guiding on the premiere Wild & Scenic rivers of the pacific northwest and though the South Fork of the Salmon may not share that same official designation and associated protections I can resolutely say that it is as important, beautiful, and VALUABLE as any other river in the western United States. It is the combination of these experiences as a science educator and pursuer of wilderness recreation that inform my opinion that the Stibnite Mine Project is too great a risk to the ecology and recreational value of the South Fork Salmon watershed to be allowed to move forward.

As the Forest Service is well aware, the Chinook Salmon run on the South Fork has been in a state of long slow recovery since clearcut logging in the 1960's resulted in erosion destroying much of their habitat. According to the DEIS, The proposed mine project will destroy more than 20% of existing critical salmon habitat in the analysis area (similar projections are stated for other recovering species including Bull Trout and Steelhead). Salmon are integral to the ecology of central Idaho, bringing necessary nutrients back from the ocean to the benefit of various species throughout every trophic level of the region's aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems. The incidental destruction of habitat associated with this proposal is an unacceptable loss at the present time given the situation that the Columbia River salmon are in. Idaho salmon will not recover on their own. It is up to human society to decide what we value and work towards preserving it. I value salmon and healthy ecosystems over gold and profits for foreign mining companies.

Beyond ecological value, the area surrounding and downstream of the proposed project also holds great recreational value; including access to hunting, motorized recreation, mountain biking, fishing, and one of the most revered and beloved stretches of wilderness river in the world (not an exaggeration). Access to these activities will certainly be diminished as much of the proposal is situated on public land that will be unusable for the duration of the project. Furthermore, if there is an accident involving cyanide solution escaping the leaching pit, there could be serious repercussions on water quality downstream of the proposed project. While mine developers work to avoid such a disaster, it is not unheard of and has occurred in the past on the nearby Yankee Fork of the Salmon River wherein 20,000 gallons of cyanide spilled into the river due to a tear in the liner of the leach pit. If such a disaster occurs, downstream water quality and the towns that depend on clean free-flowing rivers for their economy, such as Riggins, could be severely affected.

In closing I request that, due to the reasons stated above, the Forest Service, extends the comment period so that the DEIS can properly be reviewed and commented on. I also request that the Forest Service DENIES the project proposed by Midas Gold. Our society will always need to extract resources from this planet in order to maintain our quality of life but of all these resources, gold is of little utilitarian value. The short sighted economic value of this project will never compare to the long-term economic, ecological, recreational, and cultural value of the watershed of the South Fork of the Salmon River.

Best,

Patrick Baird

STEM Educator

Whitewater Kayaker

