

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

First name: Caitlin

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Ms. Jackson,

Thank you for your work in one of my favorite places: the Payette National Forest!

This summer, I drove up the windy South Fork Salmon road, following the curve of the river to a campsite on the riverbank, nestled in the pines. My friends and I waded in the cool water, chatted around a quiet campfire, and checked out the Neowise comet in the astonishingly dark sky.

We woke early the next day, anxious to start making our way to our destination: the historic Stibnite mine site. I was already awed by this part of Idaho I had never explored before, but had no idea the breadth of surprises this pocket of forest had to share with us.

We began following the East Fork of the South Fork of the Salmon River past deep, clear pools and logjams in the river from the spring earthquake, where bull trout were almost certainly finding refuge. We continued past Yellow Pine, marveling at the community golf course, until we entered Midas Gold territory.

We knew we had arrived by the "incident response boxes" we began passing with more frequency, the roadside muster points, and the signs instructing us not to wander.

We pulled over at the historic Yellow Pine Pit and surveyed the eroded hillside and deep tailings pond, indicative of years of past mining in the area. Midas Gold strategically created a "viewing area" surrounded by placards touting their plans of environmental restoration (after expanding and re-mining, of course). We all questioned: is it worth the risk? The risk of leaching, fish endangerment, etc

We spent the day continuing through the Midas site and beyond. Wildflowers bloomed in abundance alongside the road, including the most vibrant fuchsia Indian Paintbrush any of us had ever seen. We had a picnic at the Thunder Mountain overlook and took turns with binoculars marveling at a mountain goat nanny and kids on a neighboring ridge in the Frank Church Wilderness.

That afternoon after stopping for libations in Yellow Pine, my paddling friends, kayaked a stretch of the East Fork back towards camp. Another pal and I opted for a lesson in fly casting. After a few warm up casts, I caught my first ever fish on fly, a small (errr... HUGE!?) rainbow trout. I proceeded to snag willow branches for the remainder of our trip, but the thrill of pulling in that first fish has sustained me since.

I returned to the same area the following weekend, desperate to share this special place with my partner before it's too late. We hiked to an alpine lake, picked huckleberries, and gave our puppy swimming lessons in an eddy along the East Fork.

In reflecting on both of these weekends, I wonder how my experience would be different if plans for the mine move forward.

Would it be enjoyable to fish these special ripples while mining trucks haul oversized equipment up and down the road? Will we feel safe eating huckleberries off the bush, knowing that upstream cyanide is being used to sift through ore? Will we still see mountain goats and bald eagles and pika and marmots?

In addition to the intrinsic value of this area, there's economic value beyond the gold that may lie in the hills.

The most recent report from the Outdoor Industry Association found that in Idaho, outdoor recreation generates \$7.8 billion annually in consumer spending, 78,000 direct jobs, \$2.3 billion in wages and salaries, and \$447 million in state and local tax revenue. Additionally, 79% of Idahoans participate in outdoor recreation each year

The South Fork Salmon River, and the Wild and Scenic Main Salmon River downstream (where visitors spend \$13.5 million annually in the local area according to the USFS), are irreplaceable assets to this booming industry. It would be a shame to trade this for the short boom and bust of a gold mine that will cause irreparable harm to fish, wildlife, water quality, and public land.

Let your legacy be protecting this area for generations to come! Please stop the Stibnite Gold Project.