Data Submitted (UTC 11): 10/29/2020 3:46:09 AM
First name: Merry
Last name: Armstrong
Organization:
Title:
Comments: Dear Payette National Forest:
I have lived in McCall, Idaho, for 30 years and am a frequent visitor to the South Fork Salmon for general recreation. The Salmon River and its tributaries represent an important sense of place to me. I camp, hike, bike, hunt, fish and enjoy the wildlife on the south Fork of the Salmon River and annually raft the Salmon River and its tributaries. The unspoiled nature of these rivers is at the heart of my life in Idaho. The Salmon River and its tributaries represent an important sense of place to me and my family.

I am a Clinical Laboratory Scientist and Microbiologist and as such am an expert in identifying contaminants, viruses, bacteria and other microorganisms. I am familiar with chemical contamination and have done water quality testing. I am also a former commercial salmon fisherperson and understand the salmon ecosystem and the aquatic and terrestrial food webs upon which salmon rely.

First I request you extend the comment period. The present comment period is simply too short for me to review the document, nor to read and consider relevant sections and write substantive comment. This is a highly complex mining proposal. The DEIS is very disorganized and confusing. The Covid 19 pandemic has reduced opportunity for public hearings, so public written comment is the only remaining method for public input. The choice of a 75 day comment period instead of 120 days seems not in the public interest.

Second, I am very concerned about the impact that the mine will have on the local economy. It will put tremendous pressure on an already difficult housing market, causing increase in rents and home prices and does not guarantee the number or kind of jobs for locals. It will add pressure on the McCall Donnelly School District and on the water and sewer services. It will increase service demands on our telecommunications and internet infrastructure which are already overloaded. The tax payments will almost entirely go to the federal or state government and valley country taxpayers will have to pay for most of the impacts to the county.

Third, I am concerned about the impact on the fish. The Executive Summary ES-25 states that 20-26% of the Chinook salmon critical habitat, and 27-69% of bull trout critical habitat will be destroyed. Mitigation for losses of these threatened fish under the protection of the Endangered Species Act is not adequately explained. Habitat loss for these fish should not be allowed. Salmon and bull trout are iconic fish to Idaho, threatened with extinction, need clean and cold water with habitats in which to spawn and rear, and encompass the lifeblood of the area.

Fourth, I am concerned about contaminants downstream of the mine. The Executive Summary Es-25 also states that arsenic, mercury and methyl mercury will be increased in surface water in the East Fork South Fork Salmon River, but the details downstream of the mining site are not well explained. As a boater and with a family member who is a kayaker, this is alarming, as the East Fork is a popular boating destination, water is ingested by recreation it's engaging in these activities. The project, facilitated by the 1872 mining law, may allow mining on patented claims, but deleterious downstream effects are another matter. The DEIS needs to explain in detail how contaminants will be treated in perpetuity to avoid downstream effects.

Thank you for the opportunity to commend on the DEIS. Please consider the impacts on the economy, the fish, and the contaminants downstream.