

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

First name: Ronn

Last name: Julian

Organization:

Title:

Comments: The draft DEIS for the Stibnite is a great start and a notable accomplishment given the events that have transpired over the last three years. However, in my judgement, it will take additional effort to address some deficiencies in the analysis/document in the short span of time remaining before a FEIS is released. The prudent choice is to muster the resources necessary to produce a document that will stand the test it will surely receive. Any effort less than that will very likely result in a re-do. And I submit that will be wholly unacceptable.

In the early stages of this proposal, I felt there was a strong likelihood that Midas would be successful at producing a plan that would be acceptable to the multitude of interests in the South Fork. If you read my initial comments on this project, my optimism shows as well as my suggestions to be very diligent to give strong consideration to the company proposal but also equal consideration to alternative actions that may result in a different environmental effect while still enabling the mining proposal to move forward. A broad range of alternatives adds to the overall strength of the analysis and aids in bolstering confidence in the decision process. I fully expected that the analysis would demonstrate a strong environmental justification for adjusting the company's proposal in order to lessen the environmental effects. After review of the DEIS, I am concerned that is not the case.

The four action alternatives do not constitute the broad range of options available to the decision-maker on this project. I can only speculate that the most plausible reasons for this development is an incomplete familiarity of the physical and biological resources along with command of the recent mining industry history within the project area.

I do not see any of the DEIS action alternatives escaping a jeopardy biological opinion. That is a red flag. There are similar effects for all four. Another red flag. The similarity of effects is a clue that the range of alternatives is too narrow. The level of coordination between the agencies is commendable and appropriate. Thus, It would not be surprising to see the existing narrow range analysis effort proceed through the regulatory process with no changes simply because of the level of support and ownership in the range of alternatives. Another red flag. Therefore, I strongly caution that the regulatory process is not the ultimate test.

I was wrong on my initial prediction concerning possible litigation. This project will be litigated. The litigants will be overly-determined to stop this project. The narrow range of alternatives will creep into their argument. A jeopardy opinion coupled with a narrow range of alternatives is a combination I encourage you to avoid in the Ninth Circuit. I caution any project to position itself of relying on an attorney from the US Attorney's Office explaining why the USFS did not consider t5.Y[pound].alternative.

Given the current trajectory displayed in the DEIS, the path I see going forward will result in a mandate from the Court to provide additional analysis including other alternatives in a Supplemental EIS. I encourage you to avoid that scenario at all costs. I trust your experience and judgement will lead you to that conclusion, but know that I would be very supportive of that pathway because of what it means to this project.

There has never been a time when decision makers have benefitted from the level of data and information currently available for the Stibnite project. Much of that credit goes to Midas. The consolidation of ownership is the most significant happening that mining district has ever undergone. It has presented an opportunity to look at the area's resources in a comprehensive fashion. The company has done an incredible job at identifying the mineral resource. Baseline data and sampling efforts have never been so complete. The company has demonstrated a willingness to attract resources to the project for the long haul. The values to be gained are many. This large and complex project deserves a robust evaluation so it can stand the test of litigation.

## Comments specific to the No Action Alternative

This is likely the most important alternative in the analysis. It needs to be much more than a required alternative. It clearly needs to identify the likely effect of not choosing an action alternative. It clearly needs to portray the recent events that have led to the opportunity available to make substantial progress on legacy issues. Stibnite has languished for a number of decades with insufficient progress to address legacy environmental issues. There is a chance that some of that work can now be chiseled away with an associated mining project. This alternative must clearly show what scenario might develop should the project not receive regulatory approval. This alternative also must be flagged as out-of-reach of the decision maker and the rationale given as to why. It is my observation the environmental description of the No-Action Alternative does not leave the reader with a good picture of the situation. Writer/Editing will cure this impression.

I am sorry but I was not able to determine if the effects analysis is partitioned so that the various components can be selected in the final decision making. If they are, great. If they are not, I would encourage that be done. In addition, I reviewed the alternatives considered but not developed, my impression was that portion of the analysis appeared to be dominated by alternatives dealing with a shop/storage facility for the snowmobile grooming program. If that section accurately reflects the alternatives that were considered but not carried forward, I suggest that further points out misplaced effort to consider reasonable alternatives to the proposed action. The various action alternatives include various components from a long list of choices. Without identification of the agency preferred alternative in the DEIS, it becomes a little daunting to really sort out what the final selection might be. Consequently, it becomes very difficult to address comments specific to the alternatives.

The alternatives menu that I suggested in my scoping comments covers the options that I could see at the time, but is worthy of mentioning again. These include:

1. An alternative that features the mine access road (from Landmark RS to Stibnite) standard to consist of a single lane road with turnouts complete with managed industrial truck traffic (pilot cars, convoys, inbound/outbound schedules, public closures as deemed necessary, single company logistics transporter). This alternative involves a much smaller amount of construction/reconstruction of existing roadway, is less costly, require less time, and proved very valuable during the 1990's mining activity. The environmental effects of this approach would be a striking contrast to the two existing Alternatives in the DEIS. Note: There are no more important factors in any mining activity of scale in the back country than mining traffic procedures and protocols. This has been displayed over and over again. After three fuel spills involving 3 transport vehicles delivering fuel to the mines in the late '80's and '90's, the protocols developed at that time have proven to be tremendously effective at minimizing accidents. It is irresponsible to not regulate this particular activity to a high standard. Otherwise, the door is open for transport drivers who have no familiarity with the roads delivering loads on trucks designed to work on-highway.
2. An alternative that routes the powerline to the corridor adjacent to the Thunder Mountain Road to Indian Point and down the adjacent ridge to Stibnite. This location would require substantially less new road construction than the Hennessy Meadows/Horse Heaven route proposed in the DEIS. It would result in long overdue and needed improvements to the Thunder Mountain Road to mitigate multiple sources of road deterioration and sediment production. The degree of improvements would be dictated by the decision between Johnson Creek and the Burnt Log main access routes. This alternative would result in a net reduction in 138kv line upgrade.
3. There is a void in the analysis with regard to the power feed not being consistent with the Power Company Long Range Power Study.
4. An alternative that employees the use of the SFSR Road as the winter access for mining traffic during the project construction period. There are a number of desirable effects to considering this action over what is

proposed in the DEIS. The attempt to maintain winter snowmobile traffic with a motor grader wing snow berm is not viable.

5. The final decision should defer any road decommission efforts to the conditions that exist postmining. Improvements made to the Thunder Mountain Road to accommodate either the powerline or the haul route to the mine should be intended as permanent until such time it can be demonstrated that the road is no longer needed.

6. I would hasten to encourage you to consider an alternative to maintain historic access to the area east of the project that would follow the Sugar Creek route. This road would undoubtedly be in need of considerable upgrade to make it usable but to also address existing drainage inadequacies and resulting sediment production. There are some desirable benefits to not routing public traffic through an active mine as well as avoiding more land disturbance within the mine proper. Exposing some of the legacy issues in that drainage may also enhance the opportunity to obtain funding for cleanup (which is long overdue).

I noted in my review of the DEIS the map appendix displaying the "Existing Winter Routes East End" illustrates the Burntlog road as an OSV route. This route was a historic route but is currently no longer an approved route.

I offer these suggestions with the full-on intent to make this Environmental Statement as good as it can be to withstand the test that is about to come. I have spent the better part of three plus decades working and playing in this project area. While no activity can be risk free, this project can be completed only if it surpasses the test of environmental review. At this point, I would say you are only part of the way there. The remainder of the way is in reach, but it will take a renewed effort to make it. Thank you.