

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 4/6/2021 2:35:03 AM

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Comments:

The Patagonia Mountains are of the utmost importance to me on both a personal and business level. They represent the nearest Sky Islands range to where I live and harbor species that I can see or have a chance to see in few other places in the entire U.S. These include: Elegant Trogon, Ocelot, Jaguar, Mexican Spotted Owl, Montezuma Quail, Brown Vine Snake, and many other unique species. As a Wildlife Biologist I have extensively explored the Patagonia Mountains and am always impressed not only by their biodiversity, but also by the high quality of the various habitats contained within the range. The Madrean Evergreen Woodlands, Grasslands, and Chaparral are generally in very good shape. The glaring exception to this are the old mine scars and continued toxic mine seepage from the past century of mining impacts.

Further destruction of the Patagonia Mountains via mining "exploration" and mining weighs heavy on my heart, as I know the valuable biological gem that they represent. Additionally, I run a ecotourism business that values the Patagonia Mountains, which would no longer be an attractive option for showing my clients. No tourist comes here to see mining destruction and traffic.

As a Wildlife Biologist and Naturalist, I strongly feel that there should be a proper Environmental Impact Statement by the U.S. Forest Service to assess the potential damage resulting from mining exploration. A myriad of species - some threatened or endangered - inhabit the Patagonias. Their continued existence is imperiled by the short-term economic desires of a private foreign corporation which see only dollar signs and not the most biodiverse region in North America.

We must consider the cumulative impacts of past, current, and future mining projects on the Patagonia Mountains. Often I have been walking far from roads in the range, only to stumble across staked mining claims by Chevron, Shell, and other corporations looking to exploit the mountains for a short-term gain. The true value of the Patagonias lie in their inherent beauty, biodiversity, and the superb recreational opportunities that they afford to a wide range of people. Mining will irrevocably change the range into a scarred landscape useful to few save more mining corporations. Look to Clifton and Morenci in Arizona to see such landscapes. These are Public Lands that we are discussing here, yet the antiquated laws governing mining in the U.S. permit foreign corporations to ruin what belongs to all of the American people. To make matters worse, if approved the mining would be a 24/7 operation, further impacting both wildlife and people trying to enjoy their National Forest.

Finally, I support the Patagonia Area Resource Alliance and their comments regarding the negative impacts of the mine, including all so-called exploratory pits.

Sincerely,

Vincent Pinto