

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 1/8/2023 7:00:00 AM

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Title:

Comments: Russ Thurow

January 8, 2023

ATTN: Linda Jackson

Forest Supervisor

Payette National Forest

McCall, Idaho 83638

Subject: Stibnite Gold Project Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS)

Dear Supervisor Jackson:

I am very familiar with the South Fork Salmon River drainage and began exploring it in the late 1970s. My family, friends, and I continue to regularly visit the drainage to enjoy a wide variety of activities that include fishing, big game and grouse hunting, hiking, camping, observing birds and other wildlife, mushroom and wild berry gathering, skiing, and seeking solitude. In the 1980s I worked as a Senior Fisheries Research Biologist for the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. In 1984 and 1985, I conducted an extensive and intensive fisheries research project to assess the distribution and status of summer steelhead, spring/summer Chinook salmon, bull trout, westslope cutthroat trout, redband trout, and other fishes across the entire South Fork Salmon River drainage. Your Forest fisheries biologists are likely familiar with our research reports and some of that research is also cited in the SDEIS. We conducted fisheries surveys and collected data in all areas of the South Fork Salmon River drainage, including the mainstem South Fork and its tributaries as well as in the Secesh River and East Fork South Fork Salmon River (EFSFK) and their tributaries, and in Johnson Creek and its tributaries.

The South Fork Salmon River basin, including the EFSFK and its tributaries, provides immense ecological, cultural, historical, recreational, social, and economic values to the citizens of Idaho and to visitors from across the U.S. and from other nations. The SDEIS evaluates the proposed Stibnite Gold Project, a massive cyanide leach gold mining operation on federal lands in the EFSFK headwaters, an area that has been previously degraded by historical and more recent mining activities. The proposal would double the disturbance area (from 1,593 to 3,265 acres), excavate three open pits, and generate an estimated 400 million tons of additional mining

waste. The proposal represents an unacceptable risk to the diverse and immensely valuable public and Tribal resources provided by the South Fork Salmon River basin.

In addition to the detrimental risks of this proposal (outlined below) and the gaps in analysis that prevent a comprehensive evaluation of all the proposal risks, it is also relevant to point out two important concerns about the untrustworthiness of the project sponsor:

a.) Midas Gold (newly named Perpetua) has perpetually failed to provide accurate information and has instead delayed the review process by changing the mine plan during the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process. Perpetua has developed an untrustworthy reputation because many of its assurances are unsubstantiated or have proven to be inaccurate. b.) Perpetua has also demonstrated what I consider to be a clear lack of integrity and transparency. I understand that it is their prerogative to flood local media with ads that are focused on the positive aspects of their proposal, while ignoring or glossing over actual risks. However, Perpetua has demonstrated clearly unethical behavior by hiring Valley County residents and lobbyists to be mouthpieces for their very biased messages and not disclosing that these individuals were on their payroll. These actions suggest Perpetua is focused on controlling public relations rather than an objective evaluation of the risks of their proposal. To illustrate further, a few months after submitting my July 18, 2017 comments to then-Forest Supervisor Keith Lannom, I received a telephone call from a former forest employee then employed by Perpetua (in this case the person revealed his employer). This person had apparently read my comments in the public record and reached out to me since I had previously, professionally interacted with them in the 1980s. This person wanted to meet me to try and "change my mind" about the concerns I had expressed in my July 2017 letter. I find that very offensive because my concerns were based on data my crews and I collected and on my intimate knowledge of the aquatic resources in the South Fork Salmon River. By these actions, Perpetua has demonstrated that, instead of seeking an objective and rigorous assessment of their proposal, they are instead focused on attempting to control public opinion, even stooping to unethical methods.

Based on my knowledge of the history of mining in the area, my professional expertise working with the aquatic resources in the South Fork Salmon River basin, and decades of personal experiences gained while enjoying a wide variety of activities in the drainage, for the following reasons, my family and I urge you to select the "No Action" alternative:

1.) Only the No-Action Alternative meets the goal of minimizing adverse environmental impacts to public resources in this river basin. NEPA requires that the selected alternative must "strive to minimize adverse environmental impacts" on National Forest System resources.

2.) The proposal does not comply with the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA).

The EFSFK supports critical habitat for three salmonid species listed under ESA: Snake River spring/summer Chinook salmon, Snake River summer steelhead, and bull trout as well as two U.S. Forest Service Regions 1, 4 Sensitive Species: westslope cutthroat and redband trout. Under their current population levels, none of these species can accept additional risks to their persistence. The EFSFK's wild summer steelhead are especially unique and at severe risk. The South Fork Salmon River drainage is one of just three major refuges and strongholds for wild steelhead remaining in Idaho. The Middle Fork Salmon River drainage and the Selway River drainage are the other two strongholds. A few tributaries to the mainstem Salmon River upstream from the South Fork (Bargamin, Chamberlain, Horse, and Sabe creeks) also support much smaller wild steelhead populations.

All other summer steelhead populations in Idaho have either been extirpated (i.e., Boise and Payette River drainages) or the native wild stocks have been genetically altered by out-of-basin hatchery-reared stocks (i.e., the Clearwater River). The EFSFK and South Fork also supports wild spring/summer Chinook salmon. These Chinook salmon and summer steelhead are among the longest-migrating and highest-climbing remaining wild populations in the world. As a result, they are irreplaceable and of critical value to future stock persistence.

The SDEIS confirms that the Stibnite project would result in "irreversible losses" to Chinook salmon, summer steelhead, bull trout and Westslope cutthroat and redband trout populations and their critical habitats and dramatically increase risks of elevated water temperatures and hazardous material spills (SDEIS p. 4-386). Re-opening mining in the Stibnite area increases risks of leaching toxic cyanide, mercury, and arsenic from the existing Superfund site. Increasing mining activities at Stibnite also increases the risk of fuel and chemical spills and adds the risk of introducing slugs of sediment-laden water. As describe further in #3 below, not only does the so-called Burntlog transportation route NOT reduce spill risks, the proposed route would also degrade additional high quality habitats for sensitive terrestrial and aquatic species. These additional risks represent an unacceptable, severe threat to the persistence of the ESA listed and Sensitive fishes described above and would further jeopardize the persistence of these iconic and invaluable Idaho fishes. These species are important ecologically, to native Tribes for cultural and ceremonial uses, and to the general public, both recreationally and economically. Pacific Lamprey represent another at-risk, yet relatively un-surveyed native anadromous fish in the drainage. The Stibnite project would similarly increase risks to Pacific lamprey in the basin. Further, the South Fork Salmon River drainage supports a host of other native, non-salmonid aquatic species that will also be placed at risk from this proposal.

It is my understanding that ESA supersedes all other legislation, and that, under the Freedom of Information Act, the U.S. Forest Service must provide the public with evidence of its compliance with both the Endangered Species Act and the Administrative Procedures Act (APA). This compliance must be confirmed before meaningful public comment can occur. To permit mining at the scale described in the SDEIS without clear evidence of compliance with both ESA and APA would, by definition, be arbitrary and capricious.

3.) The so called "Burntlog route" would be an environmental disaster.

The Burntlog route has been inaccurately promoted as a new transport route that might somehow "magically" reduce the potential effects of the proposal. This assertion is clearly untrue. Constructing a road in the currently roadless Burntlog headwaters would threaten critical habitat for ESA listed fish, ESA listed wolverine, and potentially ESA listed lynx. Burntlog Creek supports the same three salmonid species listed under ESA: Snake River spring/summer Chinook salmon, Snake River summer steelhead, and bull trout as well as the two USFS Regions 1, 4 sensitive species: westslope cutthroat and redband trout. A spill along the proposed road would be disastrous for fish populations from Burntlog Creek through Johnson Creek, through the EFSFK, along the lower mainstem South Fork, and downstream into the mainstem Salmon River through the Wild and Scenic River corridor. The proposed road would also degrade currently inaccessible habitat for wolverine and other at-risk wildlife species that may include lynx. As you are also aware, the South Fork lies primarily within the Idaho Batholith, a granitic lithology. As a result, in addition to risks of fuel and chemical spills, new roads would also add substantial risk of fine sediments being released into surface waters,.

4. The proposal fails to meet NEPA requirements for assessing a "worst-case scenario". NEPA requires a worst-case analysis to allow an accurate, objective, and detailed evaluation of all potential effects and risks of the proposal, as well as costs of cleanup for chemical spills, etc.

5. The proposal conflicts with established Nez Perce Tribal Treaty Rights.

6. The proposal conflicts with adopted Payette and Boise Forest Plans and also fails to demonstrate compliance with the federal Clean Water Act.

7. The proposal fails to adequately address how a changing climate will alter project impacts and operations. Astoundingly, the proposal fails to incorporate climate change scenarios within its model projections. Changing air and water temperatures and altered flow regimes will have a dramatic effect on model projections and detrimental proposal effects.

8. The proposal fails to adequately describe and disclose the long and detrimental legacy of past mining impacts. For the public to understand the actual risks and true costs of the proposed actions, past mining must be fully disclosed with an extensive description of the long, relevant history of past mining and the legacy of severe impacts left by earlier mining. Antimony mining subsidized by the public began in the 1940s. Taxpayers also funded infrastructure such as the road from Yellowpine to Zena Creek and today Valley County taxpayers pay for maintenance of that road. After WWII millions of public dollars were spent attempting to clean up the toxic legacy left by earlier mining. In the 1970s, a pilot cyanide heap leaching project at Stibnite ultimately became a full mining operation until bankruptcy closed it in the mid-late 1990s. Just as in the earlier post-WWII era, taxpayers were again asked to spend vast amounts of money to clean up the mess left by a private mining company that degraded public lands and then left their mess behind. Mining is supported by investors and speculators and there is no information in the proposal to address how this new Stibnite proposal would avoid the same destructive pattern of degradation followed by abandonment, followed by public funds being spent to clean up toxic messes left by private companies. Although bonds have been mentioned, as you are aware, the antiquated 1872 Mining Act provides minimal opportunity to secure adequate bonds. To my knowledge there has never been a mine cleanup that was fully funded by a prior bond. The proposal also lacks an economic analysis based on true costs of operations, including full cleanup costs under the "worst-case scenario" mentioned above. Rather than accurate estimates, the current economic analysis also seems to be based on inflated gold values designed to lure investors. The enormous risks of the proposal are further magnified by this lack of full disclosure describing the legacy of past mining coupled with Perpetua's above-mentioned record of unethical behavior.

As a result of the evidence outlined above, and to meet the U.S. Forest Service mandate to conserve and restore diverse and valuable public resources in the South Fork Salmon River basin, my family and I urge you to select the "No Action" alternative for the proposed Stibnite Gold Project. In closing, I also urge the U.S. Forest Service to continue working with other Federal, State, and Tribal entities to pursue clean-up and reclamation of the legacy mining effects remaining in this drainage.

Thank You for the opportunity to provide these comments.

Sincerely,

/s/ Russ Thurow