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Comments: From an environmental hazard perspective, it is hard to imagine a worse place to site an open pit mine than a river, let alone one with high cultural and ecological value. All mines are subject to spills, accidents, accidental releases, and catastrophic failures and in the bottom of a river valley there is only one place for them to go - directly into the river. When I raft the South Fork Salmon every year I am not allowed to catch and eat fish because it is considered critical habitat for a number of salmonid species. U.S. taxpayers have spent tens of billions of dollars mitigating dam impacts to keep the salmon and steelhead coming back to Idaho, and we are likely to spend even more ultimately removing the dams to restore the fishery. Yet we are here seriously considering a massive new mine, from which an accidental spill could literally wipe out every fish in the most productive tributary in the entire river basin. Mine failures are common, and the fact that the proposed mine is "modern" does not make it immune to unanticipated problems, extreme events, or engineering failures. In my comments on the EIS I asked for a cost-benefit analysis of the proposed action - do the public benefits of extracting minerals at this site exceed the public cost of potential impacts, both anticipated and unanticipated. I don't see any such study in the SDEIS that allays my concerns.

The DoD has provided $25M for environmental and engineering studies of this site. These studies should include an investigation of the economic values already provided by the area to understand the true risk of such a large expansion of mining activity. I have witnessed thousands of people fishing shoulder to shoulder on the South Fork for a handful of salmon. If the fishery is worth investing tens of billions of dollars to restore, then surely it is worthwhile to safeguard that investment with a thorough economic analysis of the potential impacts from this project.