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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Mr. Grosvenor and Mr. Jones,

I would like to thank the U.S. Department of Agriculture Forest Service, Custer Gallatin National Forest (CGNF) and the Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) for preparing the East Boulder Mine Amendment 004 Draft Environmental Impact Statement.

I am an employee of Stillwater Mining Company residing in south-central Montana and directly affected by the Amendment 4 decision. I respectfully request that the Agencies consider the following comments.

First and foremost, I support the Stillwater Mining Company's proposal for new tailings and waste rock storage facilities at the East Boulder Mine. The Stillwater Mining Company has proven over the past four decades that mining in Montana can be done sustainably and responsibly. Both platinum and palladium are on the United States Geological Survey's 2022 critical minerals list. As a global leader in Platinum Group Metal (PGM) production and recycling, as well as the only primary producer of PGMs in the United States, it is essential to our local communities, the State of Montana, and our country that the agencies approve SMC's application.

As identified in the Draft EIS, PGMs are identified as a Critical Mineral by the United States Geological Survey. The Draft EIS should analyze the socioeconomic indirect effects to national security and the vulnerabilities of supply-chain disruptions under the No Action Alternative. Loss of about \$7,940,550 in Class 2 property taxes and metal mine license taxes in Sweet Grass County when operations cease in five years, representing about 56 percent of county revenues. This is a significant adverse impact and should be disclosed as such.

Through the Good Neighbor Agreement, the Stillwater Mining Company and the GNA Councils have collaborated for more than two decades to balance the need for positive rural economic development while minimizing impacts on the physical and human environments. Through this collaborative arrangement, they have developed standards that exceed state and federal standards. Please consider acknowledging that the use of these best current available technologies, including water treatment, air quality control measures, and traffic limitations, have a beneficial impact on both the physical and human environment.

East Boulder Mine is the pillar of the Big Timber community. Without East Boulder, many families would have to relocate. The effects on families and children would be long lasting and very unfortunate. With East Boulder Mine operating, Big Timber is a thriving environment to raise a family.

I appreciate the opportunity to participate in the public process and appreciate your thorough analysis. If approved, continued operations at the East Boulder Mine is beneficial for our rural communities, Montana, and our country.

Respectfully,
John Belleghem