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Comments:

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Stillwater Mining Company

East Boulder Mine Amendment 004

Expansion EIS #61385

Dear Mr. Grosvenor and Mr. Jones,

I am writing this letter in response to Stillwater Mining Company (SMC), East Boulder Mine Amendment 004 Expansion EIS #61385. This project must be approved to ensure that Sweetgrass County continues to prosper. Given the considerable amount of time invested in the design of the waste rock storage area and the new Tailings Storage Facility which includes significant safety and environmental factors, coupled with detailed agencies and independent reviews this is a "no-brainer" for approval.

Although I was born in Bozeman, when I was 3 days old I came home to the banks of Upper Deer Creek in Sweet Grass County, Montana, and have chosen to live here for most of my life. I value the way of life Montana has to offer which includes responsible utilization of the natural resources such as timber, mining, farming, and ranching. I currently live near Big Timber and serve as a State Senator in Senate District 30. Over 20 years ago there was hesitancy of a mine and associated support facilities being constructed in the East Boulder drainage. I can honestly say that over the years it has been a pleasure working with Stillwater Mining Company and watching their transparency to ensure that mining in my community is being done responsibly with very minimal impact.

For Sweetgrass County and Big Timber to continue to prosper the mine must continue to operate. The community depends on the economic support that the mine provides. This includes excellent paying jobs for employees that want to live, work, and raise a family in Montana. These employees not only live in our community but provide many hours of community service because they value this way of life. When you evaluate the economic impact of Stillwater Mining Company (SMC) to Montana, it is truly astonishing. A few examples include, over \$6 billion in economic output, \$15 million in annual local taxes, and \$5 million in metal mines license taxes.

It is apparent that SMC has worked very hard to ensure that a new tailings facility is designed and constructed to protect the environment and the local landowners. I was impressed that they researched and considered these factors:

- *Extensive environmental baseline studies
- *Design minimizes surface disturbance
- *Aligns with international best practices on tailing management
- *Includes geosynthetic lining system and a basin underdrain system
- *Designed to withstand the Maximum Credible Earthquake 7.5 Magnitude
- *Designed to withstand the Probable Maximum Flood: 47 inches of precipitation in a 24-hour period.

I believe that SMC is utilizing the best technology for the next tailing impoundment facility. Currently, filter tailings is not a viable option. I support the conclusion from the Custer Gallatin National Forest subject matter experts and Montana Department of Environmental Quality in their conclusion that the "studies conducted to date have not established the feasibility of producing a geotechnically stable filtered tailings product that can be transported and placed in a Filter Tailings Storage Facility that will remain free-standing and stable and would result in a reduction in environmental risk." SMC and its stakeholders have partnered to research alternative tailings storage

facility technologies, including filtered tailings/dry stacking, for more than 20 years. The extensive research supports the agencies' conclusion.

SMC has shown for years that it can operate in a responsible manner with very minimal impacts. Their progressive approach to working with "all" stakeholders is remarkable. This includes a legal binding Good Neighbor Agreement between the mine and the local environmental groups. The Environmental Groups get a seat at the table to discussion permitting and future expansion project. In essence, with their technical advisors, they function like another regulatory body. This includes reviewing and commenting on the Waste Rock and Tailing Storage Facilities.

Given the significant economic impact to the community, Montana, and the United States (Critical Mineral), I strongly encourage you to approve the EIS. For my area and the good people that live and work here, it is important that the East Boulder Mine is able to keep the timeline to ensure seamless operation.

Respectfully Submitted,

John Esp
State Senator, District 30