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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 Sibanye-Stillwater residing in south-central Montana and the Agencies' decision on this permit would directly affect me and our local communities. 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.

Sibanye-Stillwater is the lifeblood of our communities in south-central Montana. If the East Boulder Mine discontinued operations, close to four decades of socioeconomic benefits and growth opportunities would be lost. Sibanye-Stillwater's property taxes and metal mines license taxes represent over half of Sweet Grass County's revenue. I understand that Sweet Grass County would lose nearly \$8 million per year if operations were to cease in five years. This would be a significant adverse impact and should be disclosed as such. The analysis area identified in the Draft EIS only discloses impacts in Sweet Grass County. Due to the significant socioeconomic contributions of Sibanye-Stillwater in Montana, the Draft EIS should analyze and disclose the direct impacts to the neighboring counties, as well. How much tax revenue will be lost in Park, Stillwater, and Yellowstone Counties under the No Action Alternative? What is the loss of tax revenue to the State of Montana, and how does the indirectly impact all Montanans?

Through the Good Neighbor Agreement, Sibanye-Stillwater 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 and housing limitations, have created benefits for our communities, while limiting the impacts on our environment.

As the Community Giving Coordinator for Sibanye-Stillwater: US PGM Operations, it is our mission to improve lives through our Community Giving Program. Hundreds of non-profit organizations depend on us as we give annually \$400k in charitable contributions and \$170k in scholarships. Our people surpass our funding when we are talking about improving lives. As I reflect on our employees, they all give their time and talents to our communities in a positive way. Having lived in Big Timber for over 20 years, I see this firsthand not only from employees but also from their spouses. Not having East Boulder Mine in operation would uproot and destroy one of the most connected caring communities in Montana.

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,

Marlena Ferguson