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Organization:

Title:

Comments: June 6, 2024

Dear Coronado National Forest Service,

My husband and I live in Patagonia and are very concerned about the impacts to water quality; geology, minerals and soil; wildlife, fish and rare plants; traffic, public health and safety; noise; fire, fuels, range and vegetation; cultural resources; recreation, special uses, and scenery; climate change, air quality, environmental justice and socioeconomics; the 138kV Transmission Line; from South32's Hermosa Mine plan of operations.

My biggest concern is the plan to "dewater" the Patagonia Mountains at an approved rate of over 6 million gallons a day. This requires much more study. How will it affect the aquifer supporting the water supply of Patagonia and other residents in Santa Cruz County, already impacted by prolonged drought and the effects of climate change? What will be the consequences of releasing this water down Harshaw Creek, especially during the monsoon season? How much contamination will be released from prior mining activities into Sonoita Creek? Most importantly, how can we rely on South32 to monitor the safety of its own discharges, and why do they have 30 days to report anything, while the community is using the water every day? This monitoring must be done constantly by an independent party, with immediate notification to the community. What will South32's responsibility be if water supplies are contaminated and water must be brought in for the residents of the community? Will there be any compensation for the loss of property values?

I am concerned about air quality. I attended ADEQ's public hearing at Patagonia High School on February 26 and learned that there are no established guidelines to establish a safe level of Manganese, yet they are planning to approve the level South32 provided for the ADEQ permit. I also learned that the existing air quality study only included air from Tucson, not Mexico. South 32 plans on using cement to fill the mine shafts. What measures will be used to protect the mine workers and environment from this hazardous material?

Patagonia already has days with Air Quality alerts. More research needs to be done on the potential hazards caused by the mine operations.

The use of Dry Stack Tailings needs more research. This technology has risks, and accidents have occurred. Their exposure to Patagonia's windstorms and summer monsoons puts the environment and our communities at risk for exposure to air-borne pollutants and the leakage of hazardous chemicals into the ground and surface water.

I am concerned about the current proposal to place high-voltage power lines above ground. This places the mine site and the surrounding forest land and communities a high risk for fire. My daughter lost her entire home in 2020 to the Slater fire in Northern California due to downed power lines. This fire burned over 134,000 acres and caused over \$100 million in damages. The lives lost and the extensive property damage might have been averted had the wires been underground. The mine site and surrounding mountains are at extreme or very high risk for fire. Fighting a fire in this remote and rugged area would take a lot of resources and potentially expose the community to toxic materials.

I attended the May 20th NEPA scoping meeting at Patagonia High School and asked Forest Service employees about what studies they were doing to determine the Sobaipuri O'odham and Yaqui cultural resources in the proposed mine area and was told that South32 had hired a consultant, and information was not available. This important survey needs to be done by an independent source, if not by the Forest Service. There are known sacred plants and sites in the affected area of Coronado National Forest, Flux Canyon and the southern Patagonia Mountains. I understand exact locations of sites should not be released, but other information can still be made available.

My husband and I are avid birders and moved to Patagonia for the opportunities to enjoy the natural environment

and incredible plant and wildlife diversity. Two birds known to live in this area: the Mexican Spotted Owl and Yellow-billed Cuckoo are in an endangered status and are a candidate for federal endangered status, respectively. We frequently drive on Harshaw Road from Patagonia to Kino Springs and easily see over 30 species of birds, including Montezuma Quail and Elegant Trogon. These are birds that bird enthusiasts come from around the world to see. There is a large economic impact from these visitors, including lodging, restaurants, wineries, and local birding guides. The disturbance from truck traffic noise and dust and light pollution from the planned 24 hour operations will have a negative impact on the bird population in this area.

I am concerned about the safety of the mine workers and local community in the event of fires, accidents at the mine or on the roads. The emergency response resources, hospitals and medical services here are very limited. The entry of mining trucks onto Highway 82 traffic at the Cross Creek Connector will be a danger. The closure of the connection of Emily Lane to Cross Creek Road impacts the emergency access between the residents homes and the highway in the event of fire, or flooding in Sonoita Creek during heavy rains.

The socioeconomic impact needs to be researched. There is already a shortage of affordable housing in the area. What will the impact be to the emergency services, schools, and road maintenance?

Santa Cruz County has an 82.5% Hispanic population. The South32 Hermosa Mine Plan of Operations needs to be available in Spanish.

Please do not approve the expansion of South32's Hermosa Mine project onto and beneath National Forest Land without more research into the issues addressed above. There is too much at stake for the environment and health and safety of our community.

Sincerely,

Gayle Perrine