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Comments: The Hermosa mine project promises to de-water large sections of Red Mountain, shifting the water taken from that area into Harshaw Creek and I believe two other locations. In essence this mine will rearrange the entire water table, all the streams etc., in this area. This process will kill most of the trees and vegetation on the Mountain, leaving dry tinder for an extended period of time. In addition, because the rock in this entire area is fractured, other dry spots may occur in unpredictable areas, not just on the mountain but possibly in other heavily forested areas in the neighborhood. Patagonia has quite a lot of trees and other vegetation both in town and in the surrounding areas. In addition to trees we are in grasslands, with vegetation that is bone dry much of the year. Adding more dry tinder anywhere in our area has to increase the danger of fire enormously.

What impact will this mine project have on the fire danger we already face in this time of extreme drought? Is there any serious discussion and examination of this issue taking place?

Sonoita has already had fires on all four sides over the past few years. I personally know a couple who woke up at 3 AM to find fire burning on three sides of their property, fortunately leaving them at least one way out. Grassland fires move very very quickly, they were lucky to wake when they did. I attended a talk at the Patagonia Town Hall a couple of years ago where a fire safety expert stated that for the town of Patagonia it is not a question of IF we will be faced with fire, but WHEN.

Patagonia is not unlike Paradise Falls, there is basically one road in and out of town. When people tried to flee the flames in their cars the traffic became backed up and many had to get out of their cars and run. And as we know many did not even get to their cars. Our theater in Patagonia is showing a movie about Paradise Falls, followed by a computer simulation of what fire in Patagonia would be like. I think it would be worthwhile for everyone involved in permitting this project to watch these and ask themselves "Do I want to take responsibility if Patagonia and Sonoita become another Paradise Falls?" A fire caused by an irresponsible, profit driven company, and lax oversight.

Finally, if unpredictably rearranging the entire water distribution in our area is not dangerous enough, the very presence of large scale industrial production is also a fire danger. Even if the mine itself does not directly cause a fire on its property and may claim to have fire suppression protocols in place, it is undeniable that a huge increase in cars and trucks driving in areas where there is dry grass can easily be a fire hazard along the entire route to and from the mine. Also adding a large number of people needing to be evacuated in this area can also add to the difficulty of evacuating in time to save us all.

Do not grant permits to this mine until this issue of fire danger has been thoroughly investigated.