

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 6/10/2024 6:02:42 AM

First name: Gregory

Last name: Benoist

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I'd like to start my comment with a very brief summary of my position; do not allow South32 to operate on or under Federal lands.

The critical minerals concept is flawed. It still continues our overconsumption of new materials, further adding to our climate issues, not solving them. The United States built our national infrastructure around the automobile and personal transportation rather than mass transit. We were foolish then to allow the automotive manufacturers and oil industry to influence the direction in which we built the future that we currently live. Instead of having trains with hundreds of people being transported efficiently all at once, we have hundreds of cars with one person inside commuting in the same direction creating traffic and even more waste of fossil fuels and productive time. Instead of having livable and useable spaces, we have 9-lane wide city streets and massive parking areas. Switching to electric vehicles (EVs) will not slow climate change enough. We are still adding more holes into the planet and creating toxic levels of pollution to make new vehicles from new material. It's more of the same problem, just with a wig and a fake moustache. Car buyers have kept away from EVs because they do not see EVs as a viable alternative to their current requirements. But, as a Nation, we are failing to understand that those requirements are what we should be changing. We change these requirements by changing our approach to the National Transportation Infrastructure. If we build out systems like some of our larger cities and like what can be found throughout Europe and Asia, we can actually start to reach the aggressive goals set internationally. We need to stop our overconsumption and our fascination with disposable products. EVs are very much part of the disposable products issue. Batteries used in the vehicles become unstable at certain temperatures rendering them useless or failure, with possible fire. They are very expensive to repair on top of the high initial cost of purchase. Europe has banned the sale of single use battery devices, like disposable vape pens. Unfortunately, when EVs are involved in a total loss collision, they also get discarded. We worry about building the charging stations and the batteries, but what are doing to make it possible to recycle these batteries? Why are we not mandating the makers of these products to recycle? We have deemed these minerals critical enough to consider killing me, my neighbors, and the lands we call home; why are they not critical enough for mandatory recycling?

South32 (an Australian company) appears to be planning on automating some or all of the process of operations in this mine. The operation of equipment in any mine should not be allowed to operate until controlled by a human operator. Artificial Intelligence (AI) does not have the feel that an experienced human operator has when working with familiar equipment. AI also provides a convenient way to avoid legal responsibility for any damage that will happen under AI operation. AI can be a useful tool to assist in modeling and directing a human operator. We cannot allow such dire consequences to be risked without being able to respite any grievances caused by the mine's operation.

We also need to consider that less than 40 miles away in Santa Rita Mountains, CopperWorld (operated by Hudbay, a Canadian company) also wants to dewater for their copper mine. Two of the Sky Islands will be devastated when the aquifers are drained. Arizona is already experiencing water issues. Home wells in Sonoita are drying up, Pearce is experiencing the same issue. Our area relies on the habitats of the Sky Islands to provide a more habitable environment. The ecosystem benefits greatly from the foliage that will die if South32 drains the aquifer in Patagonia Mountains. The weather in the area is more hospitable than other parts of the state where rich, dense woodlands are not found. I have noticed that my home here gets more rainfall than my work's home office back in Detroit, Michigan. It's amazing to have these large and beautiful storms. We will lose some of that when we lose the foliage.

We need absolute guarantees and consequences for failure to protect our environment and the people.

Historically, when something harms the community the offender pays a small fine that provides little or change in

behavior. We need to start treating these failures with more seriousness. We hunt down and punish individuals for campfires that spread or defacing rocks, but simply take checks from executives that do far more damage. Mt. Lemmon has caught fire several times. Twice since Magma Copper mine was shut down. The trees have grown back on Mt. Lemmon and it is as busy as ever. Magma Copper site is still abandoned and considered a contaminated site; San Manuel is still struggling to recover from the mine shutting down. San Manuel is not unique to have experience the aftermath of a mine shutting down. Part of the issue is that the mine overwhelms the local economy and puts it into a stranglehold. We are seeing this with the lodging issues in Patagonia today. South32 has overwhelmed the area with temporary workers from out of state. These workers are booked with all the local lodging, preventing other industries from using the rooms. Ecotourism is effectively being pushed out by South32, furthering the local economy's dependence on their continued operation. We have seen this play out in other towns across Arizona and the nation. Hayden, Morenci, Globe, Mammoth, Superior, Bisbee, and Dewey-Humboldt. Dewey-Humboldt is currently under federal investigation for polluting the nearby residents.

South32 likes to point out that they are investing in the local economy. That investment is temporary and will never make up for the loss of habitat. Turn again to the towns I recently mentioned. They have all struggled to stay afloat after the mine's that they latched onto closed. The same jubilation of jobs and economic growth were told to those cities and people. I was told a similar lie about how I would be able to retire, buy a house, feed a family. Reality came and I was never able to afford that family. I was able to buy a house thanks to sheer luck. Retirement will probably never happen for me or many others in my generation unless we make changes to the way we prioritize our national agenda. We need to put the planet first, individuals second, and companies last.

Our government is supposed to represent the individual, not the company. It is in the best interest of the individual that the lands stay persevered. We don't need cars or phones; we need clean water, clean air, and clean soil. There is only a small benefit to allowing the mine to operate into Federal territory. That benefit will be to the executives and shareholders of South32, as well as battery manufacturers and automakers. The executives of South32 have a legal obligation to maximize shareholder value, they are going to work every angle they can to get this permit. We need to keep this in mind when considering this project.

Instead of destroying more of the planet in the name of saving it, we can actually save it by saying, "NO" to this permit right now. End the cycle and start the new age. We can only beat this issue if we change the way we are approaching the problem.