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Comments:

The Australian company, South 32, has pushed through a major mining operation in the environmentally important Patagonia Mountains against the will of the majority of residents. They are already drilling for manganese and zinc among other ores. Manganese and zinc are two biological toxins that affect the nervous system of humans and animals causing Parkinsons-like symptoms.

We are doing everything we can to eliminate or mitigate the environmental destruction that will occur here, irreparable harm that will devastate the area for as long as the planet exists.

They plan to discharge the ancient water below the Patagonia Mountains at 6.5 million gallons a day first to be able to operate their drills and then to use this water during the extraction process. The treated water will be released into Harshaw Creek with a downflow going east through creeks and tributaries that will reach the residents of the town of Sonoita then connecting to the Santa Cruz River that flows north to Tucson, affecting tens of thousands more people. We also don't know what the effects of this treated water will have on the wildlife that depend on the creeks and springs to survive.

Extracting the water from under the Patagonia Mountains will create a "cone of depression" miles wide collapsing the earth from the missing water and creation of drilling shafts further affecting plants, birds, animals, insects necessary for pollination and humans. Home faucets will go dry. Our wells will go dry as they have in the Willcox Playa in Arizona.

Our tourist opportunities such as Patagonia Lake, birding, hiking in pristine land, home ownership in peaceful rural areas with good air quality and little noise pollution will not survive. This area will no longer be a travel destination resulting in the decimation of our economy.

There are many things wrong with this plan, not the least of which is that this proposed expansion is in direct contradiction to the mission of the US Forest Service which is "caring for the land and serving people." Their three strategic plans for the Service are to create a wildfire crisis plan, a tribal action plan, and equity action plan. Their stated objectives are to strengthen tribal consultations and nation to nation relationships. This has not happened. The Pascua Yaqui Nation and the Tohono O'odham Nation have not been consulted. This is a mistake as indigenous approaches to the earth focus on stewardship and reciprocity not exploitation or domination of every aspect of the animal, plant and human kingdoms. Many endangered species native to this area will become extinct.

Light pollution and high noise levels will disorient animals and birds in the mining footprint. Currently a "Dark Skies" area we will lose that natural darkness which will impact the Harvard/Smithsonian observatory and the astronomers who work there. Astronomical research the University of Arizona excels on an international level will be lost. The mine plans to operate 24 hours a day seven days a week.

Another strategic pillar of the US Forest Service, the wildfire crisis response will be challenged by the construction of new roads into the Coronado National Forest, the mine's daily movement of trucks, the dangers of operating heavy equipment run by diesel fuel as well as a transmission line to be built above ground through the national forest (PG&E wildfires in California, anyone?)

This request to expand drilling and other mining operations is an example of environmental injustice. The area is populated largely by Hispanics. Environmental justice cannot be achieved by sacrificing the rights, health and well-being of communities under distress for lack of access to societal opportunities for the perceived benefit of others. To paraphrase an oft quoted trope " if the powerful are coming for the weak and vulnerable now they will come for you next."

The central point of this comment is we do not want the Australian based South32 mine at all!!!