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Organization:

Title:

Comments: TO: U.S. Forest Service

RE: South32's Hermosa Critical Minerals Project (65668)

The U.S. Forest Service's Mission Statement is "to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the Nation's forests and grasslands to meet the needs of present and future generations," and your motto is "Caring for the land and serving people." With those in mind, I hope that you will give your most in-depth consideration to the reasoning of the questions asked below and the letters opposing South32's Mine Plan of Operations, the Hermosa Project.

I have serious concerns regarding aspects of this plan, but I will concentrate on water and manganese, either one of which should be more than enough to consider halting this project's plan. From South32's video, I was astounded that 6.5 million gallons of water would be used by the mine a day! Does anyone feel this is sustainable? Arizona has been in some stage of drought for thirty years (azclimate.asu.edu/drought), and with climate change, it doesn't appear to be getting any better. Fire danger must also be considered here if our water table is further diminished. The mine folks will tell you that the water will be returned as "treated" into Harshaw Creek. Now would be a good time to read the accounts of South32's performances in Colombia, South Africa and Australia and the serious health problems of those living near South32 mines (or subsidiaries) in these countries due to precautions not taken. Or, should South32 make an error (www.mining-technology.com/news/south32-to-pay-fine-for-diverting-water-to-coal-mine), as it did in Australia illegally withdrawing 1.3 million gallons a day from an indigenous community's water reserve (over five years), have no fear because if caught, they might refund you a couple million dollars, which of course, would do nothing to restore the water lost. I am sure that these people were also assured that the procedures to be used were very safe and that the water would be restored to a safe level. People suffered ill effects, however, after believing the hype or maybe because they didn't have any entity to "serve" or protect them as we do. Would you really allow our County to be the guinea pig for unproven new procedures? Would it even be worth a chance?

My second top concern (among many others) is South32's mining of manganese. Most have now read The Manganese Road and know of manganese's potential dangers, especially if care is not taken in its transporting, etc. Cannot searches be made for manganese deposits that are not near communities? As a person with a compromised immune system, whether to continue to live here in our chosen retirement area would be a decision I would have to make, and if we did move, I'm sure our home value would be reduced and reflect this situation. I believe many would exit this area leaving it open to depression. How could the U.S. Forest Service believe or trust a company with such an abysmal record who has not cared about the health of previous, nearby communities and even illegally took reserve water from an indigenous community?

Some have said that manganese is needed for national security. I may have missed it but have not seen any explanation.

In both water management and manganese protection, does the U.S. Forest Service have the capability to monitor these actions/procedures (which unfortunately would be in real time) and to determine if South32 is doing what has been promised if allowed to go ahead? If you find South32 is not complying or that its procedure(s) is/are dangerous to the community, what recourse(s), if any, do you have? How can you take care of the land without any assurances of control? If the answer is "no," then South32 could do whatever they wanted, and you should not approve their Plan of Operations.

The Patagonia Mountains are some of the most beautiful in our State. People love coming to this area because of the rural communities and the beautiful vistas. It's relatively unspoiled and unique. You would be hard pressed to find a community who supports the land more: historical ranching and farming, groups/clubs for birding and hiking and non-profits that care about the animals and health and continuance of the rivers. NOTHING that South32 would be doing will help for the future of what is already here, but it would smite a blow to it -- the land, the businesses and the health of the people - when the mine closes. Although promises of jobs are always welcomed, it would be interesting to learn how often they come to fruition and how long they last. Mining is fickle, i.e., look no further than the copper mines who are either hiring or letting go. And then when some administration decides manganese, for example, can be obtained more cheaply elsewhere, the mine closes and what then? The damage is done and is left.

This land is under your care. This decision is yours. If this land is destroyed by the potential problems mentioned above and in the other letters, it is impossible to return it to what it was - a beautiful, active, healthy, growing, sustainable environment in a caring community. I think by the very definition of your Mission Statement and Motto, you have an obligation to vote NO on South32's Plan of Operations.

Thank you for your consideration.

Nancy M. Bohman