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Comments: The Hermosa Critical Minerals Project EIS

I am grateful for the US Forest Service NEPA EIS process required of South 32's Hermosa project because of its impact on the Patagonia community and the public lands of the Coronado National Forest. This is a project that needs scrutiny, assessment and study of impacts because of its potential to dramatically affect the entire area.

A fundamental question which should be considered first and foremost is, will the project serve just the private interest of South 32 or has it somehow embraced and sought to include and enhance the common good of the entire area? This area is a gem which should be cherished and shared. The present reality is there are 2 distinct and opposing parties involved in deciding the future of the entire area and a historic community which people call home.

The guiding principle in the EIS review should be to be good neighbors. If the project is as self-serving as it appears it is now, then it is time to look at the South 32 proposal as a work in progress that needs some work. It needs to pull back and look at the impact it will have on people, the community, the watershed and water itself, the roads, the noise and disruption, the impact on local housing and basic infrastructure, and the need to keep intact a precious community.

Unfortunately we are in the position of having to respond to South 32's proposal rather than to have input on the initial design and work out issues on both sides of the question - should there be a massive mine in this area, what would serve the area?

The scale of the project is far beyond what the local area can support. Just the water requirement of the mine doesn't seem sustainable or feasible. Is it? The South 32 or state ADEQ must study and show the residents of the area that there is sufficient water for mining and for the community of residents in the area. It seems they are mutually exclusive. If that is the case the project must be modified or not permitted.

The impact of the mining operations on the local community's housing, roads, water ways, air quality and even tourism is a major concern. The fact at this very moment is that the project has already torn up local roads seemingly without providing for the upkeep and repair of such impacts. Has South 32 included in its project the ongoing care and repair of the local roads and streets? It seems unstudied and not even taken into account in the project design. South 32 has not shown itself to be a good neighbor in this regard nor in other areas of their expansive plan.

Another impact on the community is the rental housing market which is now non-existent. Every available rental unit has gone to the influx of mining personnel. This has already changed the complexion of the community. How can that growth in personnel be sustained in Patagonia and surrounding areas. It is now evident in Nogales as well. There is no short-term fix for this reality. Has the mine consider creating its own housing stock for its workers? Has South 32 made any effort to assess its own personnel needs and how they plan to provide for them as their own community grows? Whose community is Patagonia to become?

The days are over for a private firm to come into a community and area and feel they have carte blanche to have it their way. South 32 is a private interest corporation proposing to implement a project having an irreversible, unsustainable impact on the public good. Even for the purpose of providing essential minerals for our national economy the local public good must be taken into account. Was it, is it?

The question to the NEPA assessment and review staff is "Can the Hermosa Mine Project become a good

neighbor with a sense of cooperation and mutual benefit. If it cannot, should it be allowed to use National Forest Service land for its implementation. That is the bottom line.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.