

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 6/11/2024 6:55:33 AM

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: USFS Hermosa EIS Scoping Comments

June 10, 2024

As the 550+ submitted scoping comments portray, the Hermosa Mine project triggers immensely complex tangles of potential and already-here consequences, involving a wide range of factors.

Others have spoken eloquently and knowledgably about threats to water, endangered species and ecosystems, public health and safety, and more.

I am Mary Tolena, owner of TerraSol, a campground in Patagonia that is helping to build the area's ecotourism economy. We host hikers, cyclists, birders, and other tourists and travelers.

I am also co-founder of the Our Town, Patagonia citizen survey held in late 2023, which asked residents about their concerns, hopes, and recommendations for the future in the face of the changes we face.

From these perspectives, my scoping comments are about Environmental Justice / Socioeconomics, and Recreation / Land Use.

ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE / SOCIOECONOMICS

The Hermosa Mine is the story of a foreign owner of a mere 450 acres - out of many tens of thousands in the Patagonia Mountains - launching a massive project that interrupts the lives every of resident for miles around.

Every resident is already affected by traffic, noise and dust. Every resident will be affected by consequences to our water.

Less obvious - but brought out in survey results - Patagonia Town is a *social ecosystem* that is vulnerable to environmental injustice consequences of such a huge project.

Over the decades, Patagonia citizens (median income ~\$40,000) have grown an extraordinary social system of over two dozen community organizations that work together to serve residents, support youth and seniors, foster arts and culture, and actively protect our water and natural resources. This remarkable town of 800 has a newspaper, radio station, art center, theater, opera house, library, community pool, youth center, senior center, museum, community garden, food bank, volunteer fire department, at least 8 environmental groups, and more.

This network generates significant economic value, both directly and indirectly, including social and health services; promoting education, health and well-being; attraction and support for tourism; and direct employment. Over 70% of survey respondents are involved in at least one - and usually several - organizations.

The whole system is largely volunteer-driven, and therefore dependent on residents having the enthusiasm and energy to contribute. The Hermosa project puts this balance at risk by imposing a depleting "energy tax" on all of us in the form of disruptions to daily life, worry about the future, and grief about what is being lost.

Just as changes in the natural environment can cause severe ripple effects, disruptive cultural change - like

traffic, noise, higher housing costs, and people arriving with different values - can threaten the very community spirit that makes the town work well.

RECREATION / LAND USE

Nature-based and restorative enterprises are an important and growing economic sector in Patagonia. A world-renown destination for birders and equestrians for decades, we now attract hikers and cyclists from around the world, too. Mining activities directly threaten the attractiveness of this area, not to mention recreationists' physical safety on the roads. We are already hearing that cyclists are starting to go elsewhere, repelled by mining traffic. If ecotourism withers here, we lose economic diversity and resiliency in a downward spiral that will affect the whole town and county.

SCOPING FACTORS FOR EIS

Please research and include the following in your EIS review:

What is the cumulative Opportunity Cost of residents' time and attention diverted by the presence of the Hermosa project? How many total human-hours are taken up by learning about, worrying about, talking about, and writing comments about this foreign landowner's mega-project? What else of more value could be created with those hours instead? How much more working, building, volunteering, socializing, recreating, staying healthy, strengthening our community fabric - and what would that be worth?

Given that Harshaw Road (FS 58 & 49) is the main recreational gateway to the Patagonia Mountains and San Rafael Valley, how can a safe biking/hiking path be added so that this section of Coronado National Forest can truly be "land of many uses," and not a hazardous gauntlet for anyone not in a truck?

Thank you.
Mary Tolena