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Title:

Comments: [External Email]Public Comment - Mining Nominations Project, Jessieville-Winona-Fourche Ranger District

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Dear District Ranger Welker and U.S. Forest Service Staff,

I am writing to submit my public comment in opposition to the proposed Mining Nominations Project in the Jessieville-Winona-Fourche Ranger District of the Ouachita National Forest.

My primary concern is the protection of Lake Winona and the Saline River watershed. The draft environmental assessment's own findings show that mining near the Crystal Mountain tract could increase sedimentation in the Lake Winona watershed by 825%. Lake Winona is a critical drinking water source for me and hundreds of thousands of Arkansans. Any further action that poses a threat, even minimally, of a degradation of the water supply would have serious, possibly even catastrophic public health and economic consequences, particularly for lower-income areas who already struggle to make ends meet. It's incredibly irresponsible to put this kind of burden on already vulnerable people who need help, not another problem, or another thing that will add undue financial burden to their lives.

I am also concerned about the impact on the upper Saline River, which supports recreation, fishing, paddling, and sensitive wildlife habitat including habitat for the Northern Long-eared bat, Indiana bat, and Arkansas fatmucket mussel - all listed as endangered, threatened, or sensitive species. This is just yet another thing that makes Arkansas so special and something we should strive to preserve.

Arkansas's natural areas are among its most valuable and irreplaceable assets. Commercial mining in these areas pose significant risks that are not worth the benefit, and once the damage is done, it cannot easily be undone, if at all.

At minimum, I urge the Forest Service to adopt the alternative plan that removes the Crystal Mountain tract from consideration. However, I would strongly prefer that no new commercial mining leases be issued in areas that drain into public drinking water supplies or sensitive river systems.

I have lived in Arkansas my entire life. I used to say to my parents and friends I couldn't wait to leave here, and now, I can honestly say there's no place like home. This place grows on you; quirks, smells, dusty roads, unbelievably gorgeous sunsets over the lakes and rivers, and all.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment. I ask that this comment be entered into the record and that I retain the right to object if this project moves forward.

Sincerely,

Idris Agugbuem