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Comments: To whom it may concern:

I am writing regarding the public comment period for exploratory drilling in the Toiyabe National Forest. Specifically, in reference to mineral exploration proposed as part of the "Burnt Rock Project" in Mineral County NV.

I am opposed to mineral exploration in this area as much of the proposed drilling falls within the Mono Lake watershed. Any future mining risks causing significant, irreparable harm to surface and groundwater resources critical for people and wildlife in the region.

Historically, gold exploration and mining has liberated large quantities of naturally occurring toxic heavy metals such as lead, arsenic, and mercury from ore during processing. These pre-existing metals are not an issue when they are incorporated into minerals as they are locked in place and are not mobile. However, after processing (generally via the cyanide process) these toxic heavy metals are converted into a highly water soluble ions. These pollutants are uniquely insidious because their elemental nature means they do not break down. Once heavy metal ions are released into a closed system such as the Mono Lake watershed they bioaccumulate in local life, becoming a multigenerational problem that effectively poisons wildlife indefinitely.

Mining companies typically try to cap the toxic sludge left over from mining by capping the waste in part of their excavations. However, while this may work for a time, there is no guarantee that over hundreds or thousands of years the repositories containing industrial quantities of heavy metal ions will not be weathered down or otherwise disturbed and released. Effectively, the mining companies get to make their money then leave the local people/environment with an eternal toxic mess to worry about. This story has played out time and time again in the American West, with many notable examples, only a few of which are listed below:

- 1). The Forest Service recently had to close the historic stamp mill in Mammoth Lakes due to toxic heavy metal contamination from 150 years ago.
- 2). The Clark Fork River in Montana is now the largest Superfund site in the US after a flood in 1908 washed toxic metal containing mining tailings downstream.
- 3). The 2015 Gold King wastewater spill showed how mining tailings locked away "forever" can resurface and contaminate vast areas of water resources.

In summary, I ask the Forest Service not to risk Mono Lake or any other areas of the Humboldt Toiyabe National Forest becoming the another Superfund site and to consider the long term risk of toxic heavy metal contamination from mineral exploration and eventual mining in the Mono Lake watershed.