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Comments: I am writing to express my strong concern regarding the proposed mineral exploration project within the Blackfoot River watershed.

The Blackfoot River is one of Montana's most treasured landscapes. It is a place of extraordinary ecological, recreational, cultural, and economic value that belongs not only to those of us who live nearby, but to all Montanans and future generations. After decades of restoration and significant public investment to help restore the Blackfoot and Clark Fork watersheds, we have an obligation to ensure that new industrial activities do not undermine that work.

As someone who lives along the Blackfoot River and has spent the past year working with thousands of Montanans to help protect the Blackfoot River corridor, I have seen firsthand how deeply people care about this watershed and its future.

Although this proposal is described as an exploration project, it would involve up to 127 drill pads, trenching, geotechnical and geochemical sampling, and geophysical surveys. The Forest Service should carefully evaluate not only the direct impacts of these activities but also their cumulative effects alongside the growing industrial pressures facing the Blackfoot watershed.

We must also recognize the broader context in which this proposal is being considered. Across the West, freshwater resources are under increasing pressure, and many of us have watched the Blackfoot River run lower over the years. Whether viewed through scientific projections or local observation, clean, abundant water can no longer be taken for granted. That reality calls for greater care, not less. Decisions that carry potential risks to headwaters and groundwater deserve the highest level of scrutiny.

At its heart, this decision is about values. While mineral exploration may offer private economic opportunities, clean water provides lasting public benefits that sustain wildlife, fisheries, recreation, agriculture, local communities, and future generations. Once degraded, these resources are extraordinarily difficult and costly to restore.

The Blackfoot River is one of Montana's greatest conservation success stories. It teaches us that restoration is possible, but it also reminds us that prevention is far wiser than remediation. I respectfully ask the Forest Service to conduct a rigorous environmental review, carefully consider cumulative impacts, and recognize a simple principle: clean water is worth more than what can be extracted from beneath it.

Thank you for considering my comments.