

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 9/15/2026 2:54:42 AM

First name: Esther

Last name: Thomas

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I strongly object to the draft initial plan of operations for the Sheep Creek Project submitted by US Critical Materials (USCM) in the Bitterroot National Forest.

Key Concerns:

Water Quality & Watershed Protection: The Sheep Creek drainage feeds into vital local waterways.

Exploration and future mining operations risk heavy metal contamination, acid mine drainage, and severe disruption to pristine headwaters that local communities, agricultural operations, and wildlife depend on.

Impact on Wildlife & Habitat: The proposed project area provides critical habitat and migration corridors for local wildlife, including elk, fish species, and sensitive fauna. Industrial activity, heavy equipment noise, and habitat fragmentation will permanently degrade these ecosystem functions.

Public Land Access & Community Value: The Bitterroot National Forest is a cherished public resource used heavily for recreation, fishing, hunting, and local tourism. Converting public forest land into industrial mining exploration threatens local quality of life and the outdoor recreation economy.

Cumulative Environmental Impacts: Moving forward into environmental analysis without thoroughly addressing the full scope of long-term environmental degradation, potential toxic runoff, and land disturbance poses unacceptable long-term risks to the Bitterroot Valley.

I urge the Forest Service to reject this initial plan of operations and prioritize the long-term conservation, health, and protection of the Bitterroot National Forest over mineral exploration.