

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 8/14/2026 8:12:48 PM

First name: Stephen

Last name: Kilbourn

Organization:

Title:

Comments:

You don't often get email from [REDACTED EMAIL].

Learn why this is important

[External Email]

If this message comes from an unexpected sender or references a vague/unexpected topic;
Use caution before clicking links or opening attachments.

Please send any concerns or suspicious messages to: [REDACTED EMAIL]

District Ranger Pliley,

I moved to Hamilton several years ago with my wife and kids for the beauty of this area. The Bitterroot is integral for the life of our farms, our outdoor activities, and the Bitterroot economy. . US Critical Materials? rare earth mine in the Headwaters of

the West Fork could be disastrous to these qualities of life in the Bitterroot. Any disasters would impact our home, but the heavy helicopter use during proposed mine construction and maintenance as they fly overhead, would degrade our quality of life even in the mine's "ideal scenario".

I am writing to urge you to complete an Environmental Assessment before deciding whether this Exploration can proceed. I believe the current plan insufficiently addresses potential risks to our community, water quality, and threatened and endangered species.

First, the proposal ignores the most common threats a mine poses to floodplains, wetlands, sensitive areas, and the special water source at Painted Rocks: acid mine drainage and polluted run-off from mined materials left on site. An Environmental Assessment

would facilitate a complete evaluation of groundwater, stormwater, and local geology to fully understand the risks and protections needed. A responsible proposal would present clear plans for eliminating the all-too-common occurrence of water encountering

hazardous, long-lasting toxins. A 2024 report from USCM shows that disturbance of rock at Sheep Creek could risk exposure to threatening levels of asbestos, heavy metals, and radioactive materials. If mismanaged, these would put our waterways and our community's health at risk.

Secondly, vaguely described measures for preservation of endangered species need stronger conditions, particularly in light of the heavy helicopter use in the plan and the presence of multiple listed wildlife species. Fish are not considered in the Plan, despite the presence of threatened bull trout.

Finally, the prospecting company, US Critical Materials emphasizes the need for robust community participation, and in the face of such great public controversy around this proposal, only an Environmental Assessment can fulfill this public promise. USCM CEO

stated that "environmental stewardship is not an afterthought for this project; it's foundational," and that, "the responsible path forward is [not] automatic approval? it's disciplined, evaluated, grounded in science? and informed by the voices of the people who care most about this place." I fully agree.

Based on the extraordinary circumstances listed above, the Forest Service has the responsibility to conduct an Environmental Assessment before making a decision on whether to allow exploration for Sheep Creek Mine to proceed.

Sincerely,

Stephen Kilbourn