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Dear District Ranger Pliley,

You're one of us. You MUST know with all of your education and lived experiences in our valley that this mine is a no-go. No matter what.

We've got pristine trout habitat supporting one of the most-fished Rivers in our state; 1,400 family farms and ranches and 10 billion gallons of water delivered from Painted Rocks Reservoir; a sustainable, \$80 million dollar recreation economy; and a rich local

culture that values wildlife and natural resources. US Critical Materials? rare earth mine in the Headwaters of the West Fork will be disastrous to these qualities of life in the Bitterroot no matter how "safe" they pretend it will be.

I am writing to urge you throw this whole idea in the garbage before any Exploration can proceed. This proposed mine is a dire risk to our communities, water quality, and threatened and endangered species.

We NEED our floodplains, wetlands, sensitive areas, and the special water source at Painted Rocks. We cannot risk our groundwater, stormwater, and local geology.

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 of threatening levels

of asbestos, heavy metals, and radioactive materials. If mismanaged, these would put our waterways and our community's health at risk.

Also, there are no real plans for preservation of endangered species 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, its a need they'll never get.

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." As the ex-wife of a Bakken oil fields employee I know too well the promises of greedy mineral and fuel companies and I hold no favor in their empty promises that are in black and white only.

At minimum, based on the extraordinary circumstances listed above, the Forest Service has the responsibility to conduct an Environmental Assessment before making a decision of whether to allow Exploration for Sheep Creek Mine to Proceed.

At most I beg of you on behalf of our water, our farmers, our towns, our economies, our families, our small businesses, our natural landscapes, our creatures who need us and we need them, push back in every way possible against this terrible plan. We must stand

united before these horrendous companies that think they can take whatever they want however they want. ITS

NOT THEIRS TO TAKE. Bitterrooters will not take this lying down. We will not sit idly by and let this happen.

Sincerely,

Melissa Ryan, 5th Gen, Hamilton