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Dear Forest Service,

I am writing to oppose approval of the Sheep Creek Exploration Project Plan of Operations as it is currently written.

I am a fifth-generation Montanan and a farmer in the Bitterroot Valley. Clean water is not an abstract issue to me. It is the foundation of my livelihood, my community, and the place my family has called home for generations.

The headwaters

of the West Fork and the Bitterroot River support agriculture, recreation, tourism, wildlife, and one of Montana's most valuable fisheries. A contamination event in this watershed would have consequences that could last for decades.

I do not believe the current Plan of Operations provides enough information to adequately evaluate these risks. At a minimum, the Forest Service should require comprehensive baseline monitoring of both surface water and groundwater before any

work begins, followed by independent monitoring throughout exploration and after reclamation. All monitoring data should be made publicly available.

The plan should also require complete geochemical testing of ore, waste rock, drill cuttings, dust, and other materials for heavy metals, asbestos-form minerals, uranium, thorium, and other potentially hazardous substances. The public deserves

to know exactly what materials could be disturbed and how they will be managed. Independent sampling published on USCM own website confirmed much higher rates of radioactive and potentially toxic minerals than suggested by their previous (and limited) communication

about the mine. In the attached excel document you will find that all samples contained levels of arsenic above levels considered hazardous to infants (0.035 ppm) and adults (0.13 ppm).

The transportation and helicopter plans also deserve much closer review. Moving millions of pounds of mineralized material through the West Fork corridor raises legitimate concerns about traffic safety, road impacts, bridge capacity, dust, spills,

and the effects of hundreds of helicopter flights on nearby residents, recreation, and wildlife. These impacts should be fully analyzed before any approval is considered.

The project also warrants stronger protections for fish and wildlife. Bull trout, sensitive wildlife species, and the surrounding ecosystem deserve thorough habitat analysis, water quality monitoring, and enforceable protections if exploration proceeds.

Finally, Montana has a long history of resource extraction leaving local communities to bear the environmental and financial costs long after companies have moved on. As a fifth-generation Montanan, I have seen too many examples where promises

of responsible development did not match the long-term reality. Before any disturbance occurs, the Forest Service should require full financial assurance sufficient to cover reclamation, spill response, water monitoring,

road repairs, and any other costs that could otherwise fall on taxpayers.

Approval of this exploration plan should not be interpreted as approval of any future mine. Any future mining proposal should undergo its own complete environmental review with full public involvement.

Thank you for considering my comments and for protecting the public lands and waters that are so important to the people of Montana.

The most compelling fact about mining is the fact that no single mine in history has been 100% pollution free in perpetuity. It is an inarguable fact that this mine will lead to some amount of pollution, and it is your responsibility to weigh

that risk against the minor economic value this mine would have for Montana residents.

Thank you,