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Dear Forest Supervisor Matt Anderson and District Ranger Dan Pliley,

USCM, the rare earth minerals mine proponent in the Bitterroot National Forest, recently submitted a revised exploratory mining permit application. This is the first step down the slippery slope to a full scale mining operation. The proposal is on "FAST 41"

which allows the Forest Service to fast track the project, and give USCM a green light for this proposal without (1) initiating a formal public comment period and (2) completing an Environmental Assessment to better understand the adverse environmental impacts of the proposed project.

This is NOT acceptable.

The project is expected to have adverse impacts to water quality and quantity. The water quality impacts are potentially far reaching - not just to sheep creek, but to the Bitterroot and Clark Fork Rivers. Moreover, water is at a premium in the Bitterroot,

and what water is available should be reserved for human consumption, wildlife, the native fishery and agriculture. Basin closures due to limited water quantity, are already impacting the local community - further impacts are likely to cause severe economic and ecological disruptions.

Adverse impacts to wildlife are anticipated. Sensitive and threatened species, such as wolverines, grizzly bears and bird species would like impacts harm to critical habitat, we well as direct takings. Sheep Creek is in the heart of the grizzly bear recovery

area, and would create more situations for bear-human conflicts. With climate change, wolverine habitat is shrinking. Protecting high altitude wolverine habitat (like what exists in Sheep Creek) is key to their future denning success and long-term survival.

It is also likely mining in the high elevation Sheep Creek Basin will release toxic chemicals into the environment, some of which may be virtually impossible to remediate. In particular, a geologic sub-surface assessment is necessary to document the absence/presence

of naturally occurring asbestos constituents at the Sheep Creek site. Legacy mining impacts can be seen all over Montana, and should not be permitted in this fragile ecosystem.

The issuance of a Categorical Exclusion (CE) by the Forest Service, which would enable USCM to avoid the submission of an Environmental Assessment (EA), is contrary to the public interest. Please require USCM to submit a full EA, with an associated public comment period.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Philip Nordeck

[REDACTED ADDRESS]

[REDACTED ADDRESS]

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