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Dear District Ranger,

Dear District Ranger Pliley,

I am a resident of Hamilton, MT and a member of the board of the Ravalli County Fish & Wildlife Association. Our sustainable economy here consisting of family farms, an \$80 million dollar recreation economy and a local population that supports conservation &

values natural resources are all threatened with disaster by US Minerals' attempts to establish a rare earth mine in the headwaters of the Bitterroot.

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. A responsible proposal would present clear plans to avoid poisoning our water sources. A complete Environmental

Assessment would evaluate the risks and protections required.

Secondly, proposed activities like rock blasting, storage and handling of waste rock, heavy helicopter and vehicle use, chemical use, and increased human presence are known to harass and affect survival of wildlife protected through the Endangered Species Act.

The Plan's vaguely described measures for preservation of these present species need stronger conditions, particularly since fish are not considered in the Plan and in light of heavy helicopter use.

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.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Nancy Miller-Valdez