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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Clean, healthy headwaters are one of the best aspects of our National Forests, and everyone living downstream of a National Forest ought to have clean fresh water. This project threatens exactly that, and I oppose it.

The Forest Service has disclosed that the project requires a Forest Plan amendment to "except the project from certain desired conditions related to tribal, cultural, and water resources to provide consistency with the Cibola National Forest Land Management Plan," as stated in the Substantive Provisions of Forest Service 2012 Planning Rule Directly Related to Potential Plan Amendment. What the agency has not disclosed is which specific desired conditions it intends to waive. The public is being asked to comment on the scope of this project without knowing which tribal, cultural, or water protections will be overridden to accommodate it. That is not meaningful public participation. I ask the agency to identify every specific desired condition it intends to except, and to do so before scoping closes, so that the record reflects a fully informed public response to this point.

The agency's own scoping notice lists, under its List of Substantive Issues and Expected Impacts, "local air quality, in particular, exposure of the public to radioactive radon gas vented from mine shafts" as a recognized concern. The notice provides no baseline radon data, no monitoring commitment, and no location of proposed vent shafts relative to the community of San Mateo, which sits about three miles from the project. Radioactive gas vented into the air above a community is not a hypothetical nuisance; it is a direct public health question. The agency must quantify radon exposure risk to nearby residents, disclose where vent shafts will be placed in relation to homes, and explain what protections will be in place before the draft EIS is finalized. The agency is asked to address this specifically.

Water is the issue I keep returning to. The Plan of Operations states that "Some Section 17 surface facilities, particularly the water treatment plant, would remain operational throughout the life of the mine," as cited in the Plan of Operations, meaning treated wastewater discharge to the Rio San Jose could continue for years beyond the production window itself, with full reclamation not completed until roughly six years after mining ends. The notice gives no total discharge duration and no long-term cumulative water quality analysis covering that full period. Clean water downstream of this forest matters, and the people who depend on it deserve to know the full timeline of what is being put into that water and for how long. The agency should quantify the complete multi-decade discharge timeline and its cumulative effects on water quality.

My tax dollars fund the Forest Service, and I expect that money spent on environmental review is spent honestly, with science driving the outcome. No mine should be permitted unless the final results of that mining can be assessed beforehand and the environment shown to be as intact and healthy as it is right now. Wonder, love of the land, and long-term healthy public lands are what our National Forests owe the next generation. The agency has its own scientific knowledge. I ask it to use that knowledge, not override it to serve this project.