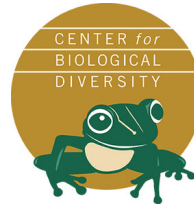




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EARTHWORKS



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Lawsuit Challenges Massive Idaho Gold Mine Threatening Wildlife, Public Health

U.S. Forest Service failed to address significant flaws in mine plan, placing Idaho's clean water, clean air, fish and wildlife habitat, and public lands at risk

MCCALL, ID — A coalition of local and national conservation groups [sued](#) the U.S. Forest Service today for its approval of the Stibnite Gold Project, an open-pit cyanide leach gold mine in Idaho's Salmon River Mountains that would jeopardize public health and clean water, harm threatened species and permanently scar thousands of acres of public land in the headwaters of the South Fork Salmon River.

Mining company Perpetua Resources' proposed mine site is 45 air miles from McCall, Idaho, adjacent to the Frank Church–River of No Return Wilderness Area and is within the homelands of the Nez Perce Tribe.

"The impacts to the South Fork Salmon River watershed, threatened fish and wildlife, public access, clean air, clean water and world class recreation from the Stibnite Gold Project are simply unacceptable," said John Robison, public lands and wildlife director for the Idaho Conservation League. "Given the recent layoffs at the Payette National Forest, we are concerned about the Forest Service's ability to manage this high-risk project in addition to all their other responsibilities."

The plan doubles the size of the existing disturbance to 3,265 acres — the equivalent of nearly 2,500 football fields — and entails excavating three massive open pits. It would create 280 million tons of waste rock and include constructing a 475-foot tall, 120-million-ton tailings storage facility — more than 1.5 times taller than the Statue of Liberty. One of the open pits would extend more than 720 feet beneath the riverbed of the East Fork South Fork Salmon River.

“Permitting this level of destruction not only threatens a culturally important area and cherished public lands, it fails to comply with the law,” said Bryan Hurlbutt, staff attorney at Advocates for the West. “By prioritizing mining and giving Perpetua Resources everything they asked for, the Forest Service violated its duties to protect fish and wildlife, and ensure clean water and air.”

During a 45-day objection period, conservation groups and others submitted 130 substantive administrative objections to the Forest Service's [Final Record of Decision](#) highlighting significant flaws in the mine plan. The approved version fails to address the water quality and public health concerns raised and fails to protect Idaho's environment and communities from the negative impacts of mining.

“Despite objections to the Forest Service's environmental analysis and concerns voiced by hundreds of people about the Stibnite Gold Project due to its pollution and public health risks, especially to Valley County, the Forest Service has neglected to address those concerns,” said Mary Faurot Petterson, board member of Save the South Fork Salmon. “The agency is required by law to consider harms to the environment and reduce those harms.”

“The Stibnite Gold Project risks irreversible harm to one of the nation's most cherished and ecologically important river ecosystems,” added Zack Waterman, Northern Rockies conservation director for American Rivers. “Given the extraordinary scale and location of the proposed development, it's unacceptable that the Final Environmental Impact Statement only considers the mine applicant's proposed mine plan and a no-action alternative.”

The lawsuit is also against the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service for violating the Endangered Species Act (ESA) by failing to protect threatened Chinook salmon, steelhead, bull trout, wolverine and whitebark pine from the mine. The South Fork Salmon River watershed is a cornerstone of efforts to restore ESA-protected Chinook salmon, steelhead and bull trout. According to the Forest Service, the South Fork Salmon River contains the “most important remaining habitat for summer Chinook salmon in the Columbia River basin.”

“This lawsuit is about protecting the South Fork Salmon River watershed from a toxic gold mine that would destroy vital habitat for salmon and bull trout along with this breathtakingly beautiful place,” said Marc Fink, senior attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity. “The agencies need to focus on cleaning up the toxic mining pollution that's already here, not make things worse by greenlighting decades more of it.”

The project requires constructing an industrial ore-processing facility, burying pristine bull trout habitat beneath 100 million tons of toxic mine tailings, building miles of new access roads and

electrical transmission lines through inventoried roadless areas and providing on-site housing and services for hundreds of workers. Immediately downstream of the mine site, the South Fork Salmon River also provides world-class recreational opportunities for whitewater paddlers and anglers alike whose access and experience would be diminished by the project.

“The mine plan would destroy critical habitat for Chinook salmon and bull trout and increase stream temperatures for up to 100 years from the removal of riparian shading,” said Nick Kunath, conservation director with Idaho Rivers United. “Perpetua Resources will leave the site in worse condition than how they found it.”

Perpetua Resources is making a concerted effort to pitch the Stibnite Gold Project as necessary for national defense due to the project’s antimony reserves. The company received \$75 million in federal funding to support antimony extraction which it is not obligated to repay. While resources like antimony are important, the Stibnite Gold Project is [fundamentally a gold mine](#). Gold accounts for 96 percent of the project profits and antimony only four percent. There is only a three-year supply of antimony at the site, and currently, any antimony mined at Stibnite would have to be shipped abroad to be refined. Under the archaic 1872 Mining Law, mining companies are allowed to extract these valuable minerals from public lands with no royalties paid to the American people.

"The Forest Service is complicit in letting Perpetua Resources pull the wool over the public’s eyes about the true nature of the Stibnite Gold Project,” said Bonnie Gestring, northwest program director at Earthworks. “The vast majority of the project’s value is from gold, not antimony, and the Forest Service’s decision to greenlight the project results in American taxpayers lining the pockets of a mining company.”

Despite the issuance of the Final Record of Decision, the project cannot be implemented until several additional key steps are completed. This includes approval from the Forest Service on additional revisions to Perpetua’s Plan of Operations, acceptance of reclamation cost estimates and review of financial assurances. Also, other federal and state permits have not yet been issued, and several of the draft permits do not sufficiently protect public health and the environment.

The conservation groups are represented by Advocates for the West, Roger Flynn of the Western Mining Action Project, Julia Thrower of Mountain Top Law, and the Center for Biological Diversity.

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Save the South Fork Salmon strives to protect and preserve the ecological, cultural, and economic resources of the South Fork of the Salmon River watershed and the well-being of the people that depend on them for generations to come.

www.savethesouthforksalmon.com

Idaho Conservation League's mission is to create a conservation community and pragmatic, enduring solutions that protect and restore the air you breathe, the water you drink, and the land and wildlife you love.

www.idahoconservation.org

Advocates for the West is a non-profit, public interest environmental law firm headquartered in Boise, Idaho, that works to defend public lands, water, fish and wildlife throughout the American West.

www.advocateswest.org

Idaho Rivers United's mission is to protect and restore the rivers and fisheries of Idaho, and is the only conservation organization in the state focused exclusively on the health and protection of river resources.

www.idahorivers.org

Earthworks mission is to protect communities and the environment against the adverse impacts of mineral and energy development while seeking sustainable solutions.

www.earthworks.org

The Center for Biological Diversity is a national, nonprofit conservation organization with more than 1.7 million members and online activists dedicated to the protection of endangered species and wild places.

www.biologicaldiversity.org

American Rivers is championing a national effort to protect and restore all rivers, from remote mountain streams to urban waterways.

www.americanrivers.org