

STATE OF
COLORADO

Cazier - DNR, Tim <tim.cazier@state.co.us>

Fwd: Zephyr Minerals Exploration in Grape Creek Wilderness Area Fremont County, CO

1 message

Peg Rooney <drpeg12@gmail.com>
To: tim.cazier@state.co.us

Mon, Jul 20, 2020 at 6:46 PM

Arkansas Valley Audubon Society (AVAS), representing 500+ members who live and recreate in the Grape Creek/Temple Canyon area, is submitting comments opposing a permit for Zephyr Minerals exploration in the Grape Creek Wilderness Study Area (proposed Wilderness Area), Area of Critical Environmental Concern.

Even though the BLM has decided to go undercover with its approval of this proposed gold mine, AVAS can not stand by while the BLM shirks its duty by not doing an environmental assessment and by not allowing public comments.

Wilderness Study Areas are "undeveloped federal lands without permanent improvements or human habitation, managed to preserve its natural conditions...Man's work should be substantially unnoticeable" (Wilderness Act Section 2 c 1). The BLM's own website says there should be "opportunities for solitude, recreation, and personal reflection."

The BLM has a mandate to protect a wilderness study area until Congress decides whether or not to designate it as wilderness as part of the National Wilderness Preservation System. The BLM "must not impair its suitability for designation as wilderness (BLM website). Non-impairment uses must be "temporary" with "no new surface disturbance."

AVAS believes that a gold mine would not be an acceptable or legal action in a wilderness study area.

Most of the work of the BLM lately has been to remove ACEC designations from public lands mostly due to politics rather than science or need. Rollbacks of land protections are accelerating by 94% (Science 2019). Rollbacks imperil clean water, affect fish and wildlife, and negate public opinion.

Zephyr claims that using helicopters will cause no adverse impacts. What about the bighorn sheep herd that lives in the area? Low-flying helicopters, landing pads, and noise cannot help but adversely affect an already stressed herd.

Pumping water out of Grape Creek will adversely impact fish populations, which in-turn will affect recreation and angling on the Creek.

Birders bring money into the Fremont County economy, even during a pandemic, since birding can be a solitary activity. Polluted water and damaged riparian areas will affect bird populations and hence birders' opportunities to see them. No birders, no money into Fremont County.

If you've ever hiked Temple Canyon, the last thing you want to see is water polluted, ancient Ute sites contaminated, and wildlife gone.

Finally, barring the public from commenting is not only disconcerting, but also discounts the opinions of the owners of federal lands.

Thank you.

Dr. Peg Rooney, President AVAS

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