



United States
Department of
Agriculture

Forest
Service

Custer National Forest

1310 Main Street
Billings, MT 59105

Gallatin National Forest

10 E Babcock Avenue
Bozeman, MT 59771



Montana Department of
Environmental Quality

PO Box 200901
Helena, MT 59620-0901

File Code: 1950

Date: November 12, 2010

Dear Interested Party:

The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), the Custer National Forest (CNF), and the Gallatin National Forest (GNF) have completed the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Stillwater Mining Company's Revised Water Management Plans and Boe Ranch LAD. The Stillwater Mine and the East Boulder Mine are existing underground mines located near Nye, Montana, and south of Big Timber, Montana, respectively. Both mines produce platinum group metals. The Stillwater Mining Company submitted applications in late 2000 to the DEQ, CNF, and GNF to amend its operation permits for these two mines. The purpose of SMC's proposed revisions are twofold: 1) to develop and implement closure and post-closure water management plans for adit water, tailings impoundments, and storm water for the Stillwater and East Boulder mines; and 2) to construct and operate a pipeline and land application disposal (LAD) system at SMC's Boe Ranch property, if needed, to dispose of treated adit and tailings waters from the East Boulder Mine during operations and at closure.

This Draft EIS analyzes SMC's proposed revisions as well as agency-proposed modifications to the revised water management plans (e.g., reclamation cover requirements, reclamation cap design, use of biological treatment systems for treatment of undiluted tailings water at closure, and post-closure water routing and channel design). The major federal and state actions include the approval of all necessary permits to implement the revised water management plans, including construction and operation. Nine alternatives (3 No Action Alternatives, 3 Proposed Action Alternatives, and 3 Agency-Mitigated Alternatives) are analyzed in detail in the DEIS. The Preferred Alternatives are 3A, 3B, and 3C.

Your comments will be invaluable to the agencies as they prepare the Final EIS and Record of Decision (ROD). Written comments must be postmarked by the Postal Service, e-mailed, faxed, or otherwise submitted by 11:59 pm on the 45th calendar day following the publication of the Notice of Availability (NOA) in the *Federal Register*. When the NOA publication date is known, a postcard will be sent to all individuals on the project mailing list to inform them of the comment period end date. This date, along with an electronic version of the DEIS, will also be available on the internet: <http://deq.mt.gov/eis.mcp.x>.

Written comment can be submitted to the project coordinators, Emily Corsi (DEQ) and Patrick Pierson (CNF).

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Comments can also be hand delivered to the DEQ Director's Office, CNF Supervisor's Office, and GNF Supervisor's Office between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. Hand delivered comments must be time and date imprinted by the respective agency by the close of business on the 45th calendar day following the publication of the NOA in the *Federal Register*.

Oral comments must be provided at the DEQ Director's Office, CNF Supervisor's Office, and GNF Supervisor's Office during normal business hours (Monday – Friday, 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.) via telephone or in person, or if during non-business hours, must be at an official agency function that is designed to elicit public comment. Two public hearings are scheduled to provide a forum for public comment. The first hearing will be at the Cobblestone Community Center (Great Room) in Absarokee (242 Woodard Avenue) at 7:00 p.m. on December 1, 2010. The second hearing will be at the Sweet Grass County High School (Cafeteria) in Big Timber (501 W. 5th Avenue) at 7:00 p.m. on December 2, 2010. An open house will be held at 6:00 p.m. before each of the hearings where you may ask technical and procedural questions of agency personnel.

As outlined in 36 CFR 215.13, only those who submit timely comments will be accepted by the Forest Service as appellants following the release of the Final EIS and ROD for the Stillwater Mining Company's Revised Water Management Plans and Boe Ranch LAD. Comments must be specific to the proposed activities and areas being analyzed. Comments should include: (1) name, address, telephone number, and organization represented, if any; (2) title of the document on which the comment is being submitted; (3) specific facts and supporting reasons for the decision makers to consider; and (4) signatures.

All comments become part of the public record associated with this project, and are available for public review, along with the name(s) of the commenter(s). Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, those who submit anonymous comments will not have standing to appeal the subsequent decision under 36 CFR 215.12.

Thank you for taking the time to be involved in this environmental review process. For more information or to request a copy of the Draft EIS, please contact one of the project coordinators, Emily Corsi or Patrick Pierson.

Sincerely,



Mary C. Erickson, Forest Supervisor
Gallatin and Custer National Forests



Richard H. Opper, Director
Montana Department of Environmental Quality

enclosure

