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Comments:

Dear Ms. Erickson:

Thank you for the opportunity to offer our comments on the CGNF Revised Forest Plan and the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. We certainly appreciate the tremendous effort put forth by you and the entire planning team. The ability to participate in webinars, find information easily, and be kept up to date on the entire process has been beneficial and, in our view, was worthy of the time and effort. We offer a sincere thank you for the robust process.

The Montana Mining Association (MMA) is a trade association of mineral developers, producers, refiners and vendors from fifteen states, including Montana, and two Canadian Provinces. The mining industry is a major employer and taxpayer in Montana, and we believe the continued viability and growth of our members' operations are significant factors in the economic health of our state and its citizens.

The MMA is pleased to see that the Draft Revised Forest Plan recognizes the important and special role Sibayne-Stillwater plays in the forest, in the state of Montana, and indeed the importance of the mining of PGMs here in Montana to the benefit of our nation. As you noted in the Draft Revised Plan, the Stillwater Complex is the only primary producer of platinum and palladium in the United States, and one of only three such producers in the world. For as long as there are PGM resources not only in the currently permitted areas, but adjacent, contiguous, or elsewhere in the forest, the mining of these resources should occur in the same environmentally sensitive manner as is Sibayne-Stillwater's proud history.

While the CGNF draft plan proposes various degrees of amenities management, it is critical that the document is very forthcoming about the regulatory framework under which federal locatable mineral resources are managed. As stated in your document, the Stillwater Complex likely houses sufficient platinum and palladium resources necessary to support mining of these minerals for the next 30 to 50 years. MMA is concerned that future planning and implementation of Sibayne-Stillwater future desired actions could become difficult, contentious, or perhaps impossible without making clear the regulatory framework for locatable minerals entry is fully disclosed throughout the overall plan. Currently, it doesn't appear to the MMA that there is adequate notice that activities would be expected to continue under any of the alternative considered. We suggest that the Stillwater Complex and related activities should be included in the discussion of all the alternatives.

MMA believes that the lack of specifics related to locatable mineral actions cause confusion as to what locatable mineral actions are, or are not, permissible within various proposed land allocations, such as recommended wilderness, backcountry areas, recreation emphasis areas and wild and scenic river corridors. Effects analysis contains little mention or recognition of other mineral management actions including but not

limited to prospecting, exploration, and development actions prior to production operations. Further, there is no recognition of mention of the disturbance due to surface support systems that are necessary for the development of mineral resources.

The only identified possible land allocation for mineral activities that is emphasized within the document is the Stillwater Complex. The document should disclose the right to conduct mineral actions throughout the Forest with the expectation of federal lands that have been specifically withdrawn from mineral entry. Although redundant, MMA states again that it firmly believes that the regulatory framework under which federal located mineral resources are managed is important and is necessary to inform forest management over the life of the forest plan and beyond.

The Montana Mining Association incorporates by reference the specific comments found on pages 2-6 submitted to you by Sibayne-Stillwater in its document dated May 28, 2019. Sibayne- Stillwater is an important and long-time MMA member producer. Sibayne-Stillwater comments are attached for your reference.

MMA, in its scoping comments submitted on March 5, 2018, brought forward other issues that bear a brief repeating in these comments.

MINERAL POTENTIAL WITHIN DESIGNATED AREAS

Many of the areas within the large Custer Gallatin forest management footprint have a long history of mineral activity. The CGNF Draft Revised Forest Plan does include the Stillwater Complex. However, it remains unclear whether or not all required analysis of mineral potential has been accomplished for the recommended Wilderness Areas, Research Natural Areas, the Special Areas and the Recreational Emphasis Areas. It is important that we understand the mineral potential of areas recommended to become, or currently, a designated area. We refer you again to the following documents though not an inclusive list:

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- * USGS Open File Report 96-256, Custer NF Pryor Mountains Resource Assessment.
- * USGS Open File Report 98-517 Custer & Gallatin NF Resource Assessment.
- * USGS Open File Report 96-25, Mineral Assessment of the Absaroka-Beartooth Study Area.
- * USGS Open-File Report 96-45, Energy and Mineral Resource Assessment of the Ashland Division of the Custer National Forest,
- * USGS Bulletin 1505, Mineral resources of the North Absaroka Wilderness Study Area, Park and Sweet Grass Counties, Montana
- * USGS Prof Paper 1654 Gallatin NF Resource Assessment.
- * MBMG 466 (lists all of the mining areas by counties).
- * USGS Circular 1305 (discusses mineral potential in Montana & Idaho).
- * USBM 1995 Special Publication titled "Availability of Federally Owned Minerals for Exploration and Development in Western States: Western Montana"

USFS LACKS STATUTORY AUTHORITY TO REGULATE MONTANA'S WATER

Throughout discussions pertaining to watersheds, riparian areas, etc. there is an appropriate consideration given to the importance of water quantity and water quality. Surface water, groundwater, and water quality in Montana are regulated solely by the State of Montana and therefore the Forest Service does not have authority

to regulate these waters, including ensuring they fully support designated beneficial uses, surrounding communities, municipal water supplies, and water quality meeting a particular criterion. It is important that this Revised Forest Plan be revised to appropriately reflect the State of Montana's authority over water resources and that surface water, groundwater, and water quality are regulated by the State of Montana.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide comments on the Draft Revised Custer Gallatin National Forest Plan and Draft Environmental Impact Statement, and associated Appendices. We understand the difficulty of revising a plan that consists of many scientific disciplines covering an immense >3-million-acre area.

Sibanye-Stillwater letter coded as 4234