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January 25, 2017

I, William E. Bensel, reside on Tongue River, South of Ranchester, Wyoming. I work and recreate in the Acme/Kleenburn/Monarch area and along Tongue River into the state of Montana and have done so for over 30 years.

I am a member of Sheridan County Land Trust which is assuming control of the retired Acme power plant and has done numerous beneficial stream improvement projects in cooperation with landowners along the Tongue River. Impacts of a large mining operation will compromise the land improvements and water quality which has been a major investment of the Land Trust and its members.

Ranching and farming operations play a big role in the area and these operations have been located strategically along the Tongue River and Valley to take advantage of water sources, pasture and alluvial soils to grow crops. I work cattle and brand with neighbors in this area and appreciate the quality of land and environment for which they are responsible stewards. The quality and best management of these lands ensures the economic prosperity of agriculture along Tongue River. Major impacts of development in the area, I believe, will cause negative consequences to ranching and reduced agri-business diversity for these operations.

The Tongue River drainage area is a critical source for rural water wells that serve human as well as livestock needs. Impacts such as water table draw-down required in mining will have direct impacts on the water resource. Further, families live along Tongue River whose quality of life, livelihoods and property values will be unavoidably disturbed with major development in the area.

Quality fishing is notable along Tongue River. The Kleenburn/Acme area is a transition zone where both warm water fish, such as Small Mouth Bass and Sauger can be found alongside cold water trout species. Negative alterations in water quality, increased suspended solids and adjacent land impacts are therefore of considerable concern where large mining operations are being considered. Significant numbers of Sheridan residents and visitors to our area frequent the river and on the developed fishery and recreational facilities known as Kleenburn Ponds which is owned by Sheridan County and administered by the Wyoming Game & Fish Department with tax payer dollars. Tongue River is a navigable water way that is used along its entire length for boating and fishing.

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Area residents are fortunate to have state trust lands and lands enrolled in the cooperative Walk-in areas through the Wyoming Game & Fish Department's "Access Yes" program. These areas at Kleenburn and Monarch provide hunting for small and large game animals and waterfowl, including an established Wood Duck population. The pheasant hunting, stocked and managed by the Game & Fish with sportsmen's dollars, is a major attraction. This use alone brings hundreds of hunters to the area each fall.

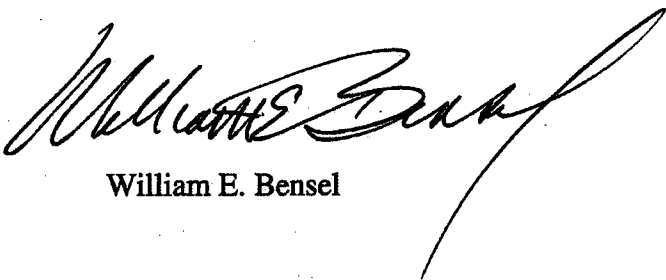
Historic sage grouse leks have been found north of I-90 near Hidden Water and Slater Creeks. Development in the area may well displace numbers of remaining grouse in the area.

Air quality in the upper Tongue River Valley is good, unlike the lower valley into Montana that is impacted by coal mining dust and coal fires made all the worse by winter inversions. The air is clear and fresh in the Acme/Kleenburn/Monarch vicinity. Large coal mining operations would change that.

Serving as a member of the Tongue River Advisory Committee through the Sheridan County Conservation District, water quality has been a major focus for us. The supply and management of our irrigation resources, especially in the face of aggressive challenges to the Yellowstone Compact, have been and continue to be a major concern for a limited resource that is the life blood of the Tongue River Valley in Wyoming. Proposed development threatens our water resources.

All these conditions and uses of the Tongue River would be compromised by new large mining operations in the area. Further, this is an economically questionable proposal presented in times of decreasing demand, plentiful supply from existing mines and lower market opportunity due alternative energy sources. Collectively and individually, these reasons make new mining proposals highly suspect and a risk to private property and the quality of life for those who live and work in the area and enjoy this special part of Sheridan County.

Sincerely,



William E. Bensel

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