

April 4, 2023

Rob Hoelscher
District Ranger, US Forest Service Black Hills National Forest
1019 N. 5th Street
Custer, SD 57730

RE: Newark Exploration Drilling Project

Dear Mr. Hoelscher,

We attended the open discussion you held at the Custer High School in hopes of learning more about the F3 Gold Mining Exploration Project. After hearing your presentation and then the various comments made by the public, we believe the exploration project is a very serious mistake and will have serious consequences to the immediate environment, as well as the immediate Custer County community.

As an architect having worked in the architectural field for over 50 years, I am very familiar with how important the role of Environmental Impact Assessment Studies are in order to assess the viability of any project that is proposed. EIA's are a standard part of any submittal for project approval where I practiced architecture. The purpose of which is to evaluate whether or not a proposed project meets certain criteria to be considered a negative or positive declaration. At the hearing I was shocked to hear that the F3 project was already given a Categorical Exclusion. It is hard to understand and believe that this type of project meets a Categorical Exclusion without a complete EIA. We ask that this be overturned and an Environmental Impact Assessment Study be completed.

I am confident that if completed, the EIA would show that there are serious concerns with some of the following categories:

1. Environmental Noise and Artificial Light: With drilling occurring 24/7 the amount of noise produced would NOT be able to meet the noise levels required for a positive approval. In addition, artificial lighting would have to be installed that would pollute our beautiful star-studded clear skies. Wildlife will definitely be affected by both the noise and light.
2. Water Pollution: Drilling will require a great amount of water transported to each drilling site and cause spillage for each platform site that would almost certainly runoff into the French Creek polluting that water. This will impact our wildlife as well as downstream domestic and farmland water usage.

3. Damage to our physical environment: Each drilling site would have to be cleared to allow for drilling. This includes damage to the existing flora and trees. Pretty hard to not destroy or damage plants and trees during these drilling operations. After the drilling is completed, will the existing sites be reinstated to their original state? Even if plants were replanted there is no guaranty they would survive and most likely the trees and plants would be very small and take years to grow back to their original sizes and density. Wildlife indigenous to these areas will be displaced.

Mining methods have changed throughout the years and there are many more people living in or near the proposed mining areas than in the past. The current environmental impacts to the beauty of the Black Hills, the wildlife and our water, will be impacted in a negative way. These negative impacts will include our Ranchers, their livestock and their well-being as well as their water. Our number one source of revenue in Custer is tourism and this will also be affected in a negative way by the above-mentioned items.

We also ask that the Lakota Treaty Rights of 1868 be respected, remembering that that the Black Hills is considered to this day as a place of spiritual meaning. The 1872 Mining Act states the main goal of mining in the Black Hills area is to protect basic soil, air, water, and cave resources. The proposed F3 Project will infringe into the Lakota spiritual meaning and NOT respect the 1872 preservation goal.

Because of the negative concerns expressed above, we vehemently oppose this project and request a complete Environment Impact Assessment Study required for the F3 Project. We urge you NOT to approve this project for the sake of preserving what is sacred to not only the Native Lakota's but to all people who live here and cherish the beautiful Black Hills.

Sincerely

Francisco and Cheryl Urrutia