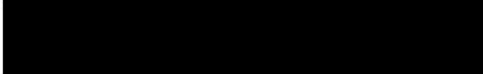


Eileen Ohliger



May 6, 2023

Bryan Karchut, Forest Supervisor
Black Hills National Forest
1019 N.5th St.
Custer, SD 57730

Dear Bryan Karchut,

Thank you for assisting in opening up the dialog with the public concerning Pactola Reservoir-Rapid Creek Watershed Withdrawal on 4/26/23. I support the proposed mineral withdrawal. Water is life and must be protected.

For me it was a very informative meeting with a diversified group of comments in support of the withdrawal. In a democratic society you would expect that since the majority of public comment was in support, (approximately 2 people in opposition) the withdrawal would be well on its way to fruition. As mentioned during the power point presentation the BLM and Stakeholders review the process. It was not clear as to whom the Stakeholders are. I would like to know.

There are so many points that are of importance to me in support of the withdrawal. Pactola not only supplies water to Rapid City and Ellsworth Air Force Base, but is a recreational area for thousands of residents and tourists; important to all forms of flora and fauna; and of extreme importance to the Native Americans who are the original people from here and stewards of the Black Hills. As evidenced by the comments and offers to begin required discussions, there must be direct dialog with all of the tribal nations involved, nation to nation, working together. There should be no meetings held or environmental decisions etc. made about anywhere in the Black Hills without proper council. There is too great of a chance for cultural genocide at stake by allowing any mining, the destruction of land and excessive water usage anywhere or possible water contamination, in the Black Hills. The Black Hills are sacred and a spiritual place for many people. All forms of mining utilizes large amounts of water. Water is sacred, water is life, without it nothing can survive. That is scientifically proven! I would like to see the mineral withdrawal include all of the sacred lands of the Black Hills.

The Black Hills of South Dakota are unique to this part of the world. Water usage and droughts are local/global issues. We have an amazing clean water source that could be lost to individuals and corporate greed. Evidence has shown that companies come in, destroy and contaminate water, environments, wild life habitat and then leave. Tax payers are left to clean up messes which can never be returned to the original condition. Where's the accountability for reclamation of mined ares? Over the years places remain contaminated and contamination leaves a wake of illnesses in its path. The small bonds that company's pay are almost an invitation for them to apply for permits and water usage. Higher bonds might deter some organizations but ideally changing the antiquated mining law of 1872 would make more sense. Funny how every treaty with the Sioux nation from 1800's have been broken but the mining law from the 1800's still holds?

I believe it is all of our responsibility including Department of the Interior; Black Hills National Forest Service; BLM; EPA.. to protect our precious water ie. waterways, tributaries, lakes, aquifers, private wells etc. and environment in every way possible in the Black Hills. The

mineral withdrawal would be a great beginning, protecting a natural resource that is so valuable and necessary for the survival of our species. Federal entities were originally enacted to conserve, protect, and manage our resources. An EA needs to be completed, not falsely compared to Jenny Gulch. It appears in "Multiple use" that land can be set aside under certain circumstances which many of the points being addressed by the public qualify. It does not mean that all federal lands should be used and as I feel abused. We live in a very unique and sacred place. Cultural, environmental issues etc. are so important here... The Black Hills are home to many tribes whose creation stories begin here.

Water is sacred, Mni Wiconi in Lakota. In 1868; The Treaty of Ft. Laramie, guaranteed ownership of the Black Hills to First Nations; By 1877 the Black Hills were seized illegally by the federal government because "gold was discovered in them hills"; 1979 a federal court decision actually declared that one of the most dishonorable acts in American history was seizure of the Black Hills from the First Nations. In 1980 the great Sioux Nation was awarded \$105 million for the Black Hills which was not accepted because the Black Hills are not for sale. Please, let there be no more "broken promises" to the people of this land. The Indians here are the people of this land and the assigned protectors of our sacred home for many years, prior to European settlers. Please, let's set a good example for the people of our great nation of the United States by doing the right thing. It's not only our responsibility to do the right thing, but also to be accountable for all decisions and actions. We can set the precedence. The Black Hills is the heart of all that is. Please, complete an EA, and FONSI after its conclusion. Enact the mineral withdrawal that will protect the entire Black Hills of South Dakota now and for future generations.

Sincerely,



Eileen Ohliger

Eileen Ohliger