



June 20, 2023

Deb Haaland
Secretary, US Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Thomas J. Vilsack
Secretary, US Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Haaland and Secretary Vilsack:

We are writing for our millions of members to ask you to approve and implement a mineral withdrawal on unceded Lakota homelands that are currently administered by Black Hills National Forest. As proposed, this action would withdraw 20,574 acres of National Forest System lands from settlement, sale, location, or entry under the public land laws; location and entry under the U.S. mining laws; and leasing under the mineral and geothermal leasing laws for 20 years, subject to valid existing rights.

The stated goals of this proposed action are to protect the cultural and natural resources of the Pactola Reservoir-Rapid Creek Watershed in Pennington County, South Dakota. This would include protection of the water supply for Rapid City, Ellsworth Air Force Base, and tribal and ranching communities down the Cheyenne River to the Missouri River.

We support this proposal, and we ask that the area covered by the withdrawal be expanded to meet the stated goals of the proposal. As of April 2023, about 248,000 acres of the Black Hills – 20% of the total landscape – were under active mining claims as a result of the 1872 General Mining Act. This poses a grave threat to water, cultural resources, communities, and land.

There is no clearer case of an environmental injustice than the United States government's treatment of the Lakota (Sioux) nation with regards to the Black Hills. The Black Hills are a tree-covered island that rises above the northern Great Plains and are the source of both ground and surface water for a large region. They are sacred to multiple indigenous nations and are unique ecologically, historically, geologically, and culturally. Lakota people call them "Wamake Ognaka Icante" or "The Heart of Everything That Is."

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Under the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty, the Black Hills and a broad surrounding area were reserved to the Lakota, and the United States promised to keep non-Indians out of the area. In 1874, in flagrant violation of this Treaty, General George Custer led an illegal expedition into the Hills, then announced that he had found gold. This set off a gold rush of settlers, and the Army then drove the Lakota onto reservations outside the Hills. There, the Lakota were totally dependent on the U.S. due to a federal policy that led to the slaughter of the huge buffalo herds that the region's indigenous nations had relied on for thousands of years.

Looking at this chain of events, Court of Claims Judge Fred Nichols observed in 1975 that "[A] more ripe and rank case of dishonorable dealings will never, in all probability, be found in our history." In the 8-to-1 opinion in the 1980 U.S. Supreme Court decision *United States v. Sioux Nation of Indians*, the Court acknowledged that the Black Hills had been stolen from the Lakota and assigned monetary damages. However, the Lakota have never accepted the money and have consistently said that the Black Hills are not for sale and remain under Lakota ownership due to the operation of the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty. As a result, all issues surrounding land, water, and other resources in the Black Hills are Environmental Justice issues.

Working in and with alliances like ours, tribal members have been in the leadership of efforts to prevent new large-scale mining in the Black Hills. In 1981, an alliance successfully held off an effort to restart uranium mining by some of the largest corporations in the country. In the last 20 years, alliances have again held off new large-scale uranium mining, gold mining, and rare earths mining. The modern indigenous and non-Indian residents of the Black Hills have made it clear that they want the Hills to continue to provide clean water, sacred landscapes, and an economy that is not based on mineral extraction.

With our allies from around the United States who have signed onto this letter, we welcome the proposed mineral withdrawal and respectfully ask for it to be expanded and approved. It is the right thing to do in the interest of environmental justice. It is the right thing to do for the regional tourism and outdoor recreation economy, for national security, and for the protection of water and of unique, sacred, and endangered landscapes.

Thank you for your consideration of our requests.

Sincerely,



Lilias Jones Jarding, Ph.D.
Executive Director
Black Hills Clean Water Alliance

SIGNATORY ORGANIZATIONS

A Community Voice – ACORN
New Orleans, LA

Aktionsgruppe Indianer & Menschenrechte e.V.
Munich, Germany

Agroterra
Longmont, CO

Alaska Community Action on Toxics
Anchorage, AK

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Anthropocene Alliance
Nationwide

Asociacion de Residentes de la Margarita, Inc.
Salinas, PR

Association on American Indian Affairs
Clarksville, MD

Center for Biological Diversity
Duluth, MN

Chickaloon Native Village
Chickaloon, AK

Citizens' Resistance at Fermi (CRAFT)
Redford, MI

Clean Water Legacy
Rapid City, SD

Coal River Mountain Watch
Naoma, WV

Coco Canary
Saint Paul, MN

Dakota Rural Action
Brookings, SD

Mumenigo/SOSW, Inc.
CO

Earthjustice
Nationwide

Earthworks
Washington, DC

Fair Mining Collaborative
Victoria, BC

Fall River Stewards
Hot Springs, SD

Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness
Ely, MN

Great Basin Resource Watch
Reno, NV

Harness
Los Angeles, CA

Honor the Earth
Anishinaabe Territory, MN

Indigenous Environmental Network
Bemidji, MN

INFORM/Information Network for Responsible
Mining
Broomfield, CO

International Indian Treaty Council
Tucson, AZ

Lutefisktechnologies, Inc.
Ely, MN

Lynn Canal Conservation
Haines, AK

Malach Consulting
Spanish Fork, UT

Mazaska Talks
Seattle, WA

Micah Six Eight Mission
Sulphur, LA

Mni Ki Wakan/Indigenous Water Decade
Minneapolis, MN

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Multicultural Alliance for a Safe Environment
Albuquerque, NM

National Parks Conservation Association
Washington, DC

New Image Life Skills Academy Inc.
Cleveland, OH

Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness
Ely, MN

PRBB Foundation
Bozeman, MT

Save Lake Superior Association
Two Harbors, MN

Save Our Sky Blue Waters
Duluth, MN

Shelterwood Collective
Cazadero, CA

South Bronx Unite
New York, NY

Stand.earth
San Francisco, CA

Strong Asian Lead
Los Angeles, CA

The Clinch Coalition
Wise, VA

The Truth Telling Project
Ferguson, MO

Towards Right Relationships with Indigenous
People Committee – Twin Cities Friends Meeting
St. Paul, MN

Uranium Watch
Moab, UT

Wateca Challenge
Rapid City, SD

WaterLegacy
Duluth, MN

Cc: Joe Biden, President, White House

Brenda Mallory, Chair, Council on Environmental Quality

Tracy Stone-Manning, Director, Bureau of Land Management

Randy Moore, Chief, US Forest Service

Michael S. Regan, Administrator, US Environmental Protection Agency

K.C. Becker, Region 8 Administrator, US Environmental Protection Agency

Kimberly O. Prill, Deputy State Director, Bureau of Land Management, Montana/Dakotas State Office

Jacqueline A. Buchanan, Deputy Regional Forester, Rocky Mountain Region, US Department of Agriculture

Carl Petrik, Acting Forest Supervisor, Black Hills National Forest

Filed through USFS Portal

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