

Fw: Forest Service plans to eradicate Black Hills spruce trees.

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Sent: Tuesday, October 3, 2023 8:02 PM

To: khargens1024@msn <khargens1024@msn>

Subject: Forest Service plans to eradicate Black Hills spruce trees.

By way of introduction my name is Kenneth Hargens. I am a Black Hills native due to my paternal grandfather coming to the Hills in 1892. (See BLACK HILLS DOC, 1892-1945). As my grandfather passed at an age closer to 100 and as my father was a WWI veteran, I early developed a strong interest in the Black Hills environment and ecology. This the first time I have addressed your organization related to the current subject of concern. Said subject are the plans of the Forest Service to eradicate thousands of acres of Black Hills spruce. Incidentally, I have done trail maintenance for the Forest Service throughout these southern Black Hills, including the Norbeck Wildlife Preserve. As a Black Hills native with two science-related degrees from SDSM&T and SDSU, I have a long standing interest in the health and thriving of the trees of our Black Hills.

I was recently saddened and disturbed when I realized the scope of the Forest Service's project to decimate hundreds of acres of ponderosa pine adjacent to my property of Redfern which is located on the Mystic Road NW of Hill City. The Forest Service declared these destroyed ponderosa pines to be a 'non-native' species and every tree was cut over the hundreds of acres. The landscape today is barren with huge thistle patches. It is noted that what was referred to as 'non-native' species continue to grow and thrive in other locations in the Black Hills. Even close by the destroyed areas.

But currently, my area of concern is the Forest Service's newest plan to destroy thousands of acres of Black Hills spruce trees which have flourished and thrived in our Hills for thousands of years. It seems as though the Forest Service personnel sit with nothing to do but make these misguided plans to change our beautiful landscape.

The nature of the growth of spruce tree stands provides a habitat for animals that naturally prey on deer and help to maintain a healthy population of that species. As a guy who has spent a lifetime trekking our forests, not only in the Black Hills but in Alaska, Oregon, and Wyoming, I have an especially keen admiration for our spruce trees. Black Hills spruce trees occupy a huge part in the ecosystem of the Black Hills and I can not discern any valid reason to eradicate the spruce trees on thousands of acres in our Black Hills. Spruce trees grow mainly near streams and watercourses in the Hills. As such, they provide habitat for ospreys and other birds of prey. The spruce trees provide a buffer zone to help prevent silt from washing into our streams and drinking water sources.

Due to the growth patterns of spruce forests the ground beneath spruce trees is always moist and this helps to prevent ground fires. If one is to observe spruce trees from a distance he can see that tall dead trees represent a natural thinning due to the death of mature trees. These dead trees offer a convenient observation perch for birds of prey and also possible nesting spots. Also, as our spruce trees are not susceptible to the pine beetles, they may provide a further buffer zone to prevent the pine beetles access to pine forests adjacent to the spruce trees. Finally, the spruce trees emit tons of life-giving oxygen into our atmosphere as they recycle carbon dioxide. This is a very important function of spruce trees as today, thousands of acres of trees are destroyed due to deforestation and wildfires.

Once again, I can not find any valid reason for the Forest Service's misguided and ill-informed plan to destroy our Black Hills spruce forests.

I find it laughable that the Forest Service claims that eliminating the spruce trees will prevent wildfires. I challenge the Forest Service to give one example of a forest fire starting in a spruce forest. Included in their plans are the building of miles of additional roads in our Black Hills. We shudder to think of more roads pouring silt and sediment into our trout streams and sources of drinking water. Years ago it was determined that the Black Hills had more miles of roads per square mile than any other national forest. Nowadays, the Black Hills have hundreds of miles of ATV trails, which have little or no water bars or erosion controls, this only adds to more silt and sediment pouring into our streams.

It is apparent to us that the Forest Service considers our Black Hills as a destructive playground for visitors and as an area to put into effect misguided, ill-informed and uneducated plans for forest management.

We are hoping that the Norbeck Society and other associations may take an interest in the current plans to eliminate spruce trees and to help prevent further destruction of trees and habitat in the Black Hills.

Kenneth Hargens

HELLO :

4 OCT 2023

COULD YOU PLEASE SEE THAT MY
ENCLOSED COMMENT REACHES THE APPROPRIATE
INDIVIDUALS? AND THAT IT IS INCLUDED ON
THE COMMENTS PAGE?

I WAS UNABLE TO EMAIL IT TO ANY
OF THE BLACK HILLS NATIONAL FOREST
EMAIL ADDRESSES I LOCATED.

THANK YOU.

Kenneth Hargers