To whom it may concern,

I am writing to give opposition to the proposed Rochford Mineral Exploratory Drilling Project. As a South Dakota resident and member of the public I would like to express my concern and apprehension surrounding this project. While this is exploratory and preliminary, the outcome of this project could result in extensive mining operations in the future. These operations cause a variety of environmental issues such as noise, water and air pollution that affect not only the members of the public that enjoy the national forest for recreational purposes but people who are residential to the area and surrounding towns.

My career is in wildlife research specifically focusing on ungulates (elk, deer, bighorn sheep, etc.) and from experience I have seen how vulnerable not only ungulates but many animals such as birds, small mammals, reptiles and amphibians are to high noise and human activity. Based on the proposal of just the exploratory project there will be lots of mechanical and human activity that will impact the surrounding wildlife. Currently some of the area does not allow motorized vehicles which protects the wildlife and public from noise pollution as well as other types of mechanical pollution and lessens the impact of invasive flora species.

In reviewing the proposal, the requestors discuss returning areas and routes to natural conditions however I do not see any detail of how this will be achieved. The requestors discuss that water will not be used from the surrounding areas and plan to provide approved sourced water. They do not outline how this water will be used in the drilling process and do not provide explanation as to how they are draining or discarding the water. While the requestors are searching for graphite, other contaminates could be in the cores and thus would pollute surrounding areas if requestors are utilizing water without proper drainage (i.e. draining water contaminated back into this ecosystem) and/or through debris being picked up into the air by wind. While I understand this proposal falls within the listed regulations of 36CFR 220.6 I find this proposal inadequate and lacks significant details for how the requestors plan to minimize damage and pollution thus I request a further environmental analysis to be completed prior to any work, including exploratory work, to be done to assess how this will impact the surrounding ecosystem.

Lastly, there is considerable amounts of research done over the effects of mining on the ecosystem. While this project is targeting graphite, as mentioned before other contaminates may be present in the soils and previous studies have shown negative impacts of animals (Pisocnte et al. 2024, Gomez-Ramirez et al. 2011, Eisler et al. 2004). While the proposed project is preliminary, the effects of mining can last for years following mining operations and still can affect ecosystems, water ways, wildlife and flora (Shul’kin et al. 2015, Zhang et al. 2023, Martin et al. 2020).

Due to all the details listed above, I would like to request an extension for public comment for 60 days. I would also like request an environmental impact study to assess the area before any project starts. Please feel free to reach out if further information, clarification or comments are needed.

Sincerely,

Rachael C. Wiedmeier

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