**Public Comment on Pete Lien and Sons Rochford Mineral Exploratory Drilling Project (#67838)**

**Submitted by:** Brave Heart Society
**Date:** May 16, 2025
**Location:** Lake Andes, South Dakota

**To Whom It May Concern,**

We write on behalf of the *Brave Heart Society*, a traditional women's society that has stood in defense of sacred sites, clean water, and the rights of our grandchildren for over 30 years. We are grandmothers, mothers, and daughters of the *Oceti Sakowin* keepers of memory, lifeways, and law. And we are angry.

We are angry that in 2025, we are still being forced to defend the Black Hills from desecration. We are angry that *Pe’ Sla*, one of the most sacred places in our entire universe, is once again under threat. And we are angry that the U.S. Forest Service is attempting to rush through an industrial exploratory drilling project under the cover of a **Categorical Exclusion**, as if this were just another patch of land to puncture and poison.

Let us be absolutely clear: **this is sacred land. This is ceremonial land. This is treaty land.** And it is not yours to ruin.

**Our Law Is Older Than Your Law**

*Pe’ Sla* is not merely a place on a map. It is a **sacred altar**. It is where we offer prayers for the health of the world, where we fulfill ancient covenants, where we remember who we are and who we serve. No paper title or agency boundary can erase that. Long before the ink dried on your mining permits or your NEPA shortcuts, our ancestors were praying here, and we will continue to do so whether you recognize it or not.

Drilling near *Pe’ Sla* is a **spiritual violation**. You cannot separate the ecological from the spiritual. Every tree felled, every core drilled, every truck that roars across that land is a wound to us, and to the land herself.

**Water Is Sacred, And You Are Endangering It**

The proposed drilling zone lies within the **Rapid Creek watershed**, which provides water to Rapid City and surrounding communities. You may call it exploratory, but there is no such thing as “low-impact” drilling when it comes to groundwater, headwater springs, and fractured bedrock in sacred mountain terrain.

Do you understand what happens when drilling cuts into veins of water and exposes them to graphite slurry, lubricant fluids, or surface spills? Do you think sacred headwaters can be stitched back together once they’re ruptured? **What flows from this land is more than water, it is life.** And the burden of proof is not on us to show harm, but on you to show respect.

**Relatives Live There Too**

This land is home to more than humans. It is a sanctuary for elk, bear, lynx, birds, medicines, pollinators, and ancestors. Some of these beings are listed on your “threatened species” sheets. Others are beyond your understanding. But to us, **they are relatives.** This project threatens them with displacement, noise, habitat fragmentation, and irreversible disruption of seasonal rhythms.

We are sick of watching the forest be reduced to lines on a permit map. The Earth is not your experiment. She is not your extraction site. She is not your commodity. She is our relative, and she is already wounded from over a century of this so-called development.

**Enough Is Enough**

We are not confused, and we are not fooled. This project is being disguised as a small step “just exploratory,” you say. But we know better. **Exploratory drilling is not harmless, it is the first claw of the machine.** And once that machine starts digging, it rarely stops.

You have seen the resistance to the Black Hills gold mining projects. You have seen the court challenges, the marches, the blockades. We have been here before, and we are prepared to stand here again. We are not asking for your permission to be angry. We are telling you: this ends here.

**Our Demands**

We demand the following:

1. **The immediate rejection of the Categorical Exclusion** for the Rochford drilling project (#67838). This project demands a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS).
2. **Full and transparent government-to-government consultation** with all affected Tribal Nations and traditional societies, including Brave Heart Society.
3. **Permanent protections for Pe’ Sla and the surrounding area** from mining and extractive activity.
4. **Recognition of the sacred nature of this land**, not only in words, but in policy and action.

**In Closing**

We carry sacred bundles. We carry the memory of our ancestors. We carry the responsibility to protect what is left. And we are tired, tired of having to defend the sacred over and over again because agencies like yours cannot seem to hear us unless we raise our voices.

Well, we are raising them now.

This land is sacred. This land is alive. And **this land is not yours to destroy**.

Respectfully, but unshakably,

**Brave Heart Society**
Lake Andes, South Dakota
May 16, 2025