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Comments: To Whom It May Concern,

It is very important that whoever has the authority to grant permission to an entity interested in exploring for minerals in the Black Hills understand that the citizens of South Dakota and the residents off the Black Hills do not want this. Not just the Newark Exploration Drilling Project but any project of this kind. It is insulting to the public you serve to sell the idea of this project as an innocuous activity that will use an unthreatening use of water in an activity implied to end at the end of the exploration. If that truly were the case, that the mining activity were to end at the end of the drilling exploration then there is no need to go forward with the project to begin with. If a mineral were to be discovered in the exploratory process there is no way that the public is going to be interested in that mining destruction of where we live.

In the recent three years since the COVID pandemic it has become abundantly clear that not just South Dakotans, not just residents of the Black Hills, but the nation as a whole, wants as much of the Black Hills as intact as possible. As COVID has subsided tourism has not. People are urgently seeking places of refuge where clear clean air and water can be experienced in a way restorative to the stresses of contemporary life. So besides the necessity of good clean water that is at risk of decreasing due to drought and demand, there are more reasons than ever to protect the Black Hills.

And speaking of water, it was stated at the public meeting in Custer last evening that the proposed area of exploratory drilling is not over any aquifers. Who is that false statement supposed to fool. Besides aquifers any hydrologist can tell you that water is found at multiple levels traveling through fissures in hard rock and piercing randomly through the hard rock risks disrupting and contaminating those flows that feed vital wells for humans and livestock.

It must be remembered that national forests are multi use lands. This guiding principal must be born in mind. I understand the mining law of 1872 is invoked by mining interests to do whatever they would like for their profits. But the multi use intention of national forest public lands must also be taken into account. The potential for any of these exploratory activities is very large and disruptive and precedent setting. Categorical Exclusion seems to me to be an end run strategy to avoid responsible participation in an existing community, to the populations of people who do use these lands for multi purposes more now than ever before.

Finally, in considering the exploratory drilling pad sites it must also be born in mind that the equipment and activity creates serious compaction of the surface soils which then impedes the recovery of the ecosystems. So even if no minerals are discovered or not enough to warrant mining, at the surface level a great deal of damage will have been done. Damage that would be expensive and further disruptive to reverse.

Thank you for your consideration of my comments.

Thomas D Thorson