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First name: Governor Kristi

Last name: Noem

Organization: State of South Dakota Office of the Governor

Title: Governor

Comments: Letter Text:

Dear Mr. Cochran,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the above referenced Environmental Assessment (EA) and Draft Findings of No Significant Impact.

Following the draft environmental assessment from the USDA and finding of no significant impact for the Pactola Reservoir Rapid Creek Watershed Withdrawal Project, the State of South Dakota continues to disapprove the U.S. Forest Service's proposal requesting the Bureau of Land Management to withdraw 20,574 acres of National Forest System (NFS) lands in Pennington County, South Dakota from the traditional legal methods for development.

This proposal fails to strike a proper balance between protecting and maintaining the natural beauty of South Dakota's public lands and allowing potential development of important mineral resources. Once again, the federal overreach is imposing national level policy priorities while sidelining states and undermining local communities.

South Dakota's mining and environmental requirements ensure mineral development is protective of water quality and human health. I believe mineral exploration and mining can be conducted in the proposed exclusion area with no significant threat to local municipal water supplies.

Mining and other forms of mineral development provide critical economic and security benefits to our local communities, the state, and the nation. Implementation of the proposed mineral exclusion would unduly hinder or preclude beneficial use of our public lands. By restricting mineral development in South Dakota and across the country, while at the same time pushing electric vehicle use, the federal government is furthering our reliance on countries like China for critical mineral resources.

The State of South Dakota disapproves of the proposed withdrawal, and we request extending the comment period for an additional 60 days to allow for proper review and stakeholder feedback of the reports and data. Specifically, an extension would allow the federally required National Forest Advisory Board to discuss the withdrawal and provide necessary input at their next meeting.

Mineral development is an important part of South Dakota's economy and plays a critical role in our national security. Excluding over 20,000 acres of potential mineral development in the Rapid Creek watershed would unnecessarily burden or even prevent responsible development of domestic mineral supplies. We continue to disapprove of this proposal and ask you to allow us to rely on our state environmental requirements which have proven effective for many decades.

Sincerely,

Kristi Noem

Governor