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First name: Danelle

Last name: Conrad

Organization:

Title:

Comments: My name is Danelle Conrad. My husband and I are the owners of Stage Stop Properties LLC.

I am writing as an affected landowner to express my opposition to mineral drilling in the North Fork Castle Creek Watershed, including the proposed Pete Lien and Sons Rochford Mineral Drilling Project. As the headwaters of Rapid Creek and an area rich with ecological, historical, and cultural significance, this area is not feasible for the large-scale mining that this drilling could catalyze. Therefore, the risks and impacts of drilling 1000ft for graphite will not be worth the benefits.

Regardless of my opposition to drilling and mining in the area, I find it concerning that the Mystic Ranger has declared this project qualifies for Categorical Exclusion (CE) and therefore will not receive an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). According to the Interior Department, CEs are a category of actions that "does not significantly affect the quality of the human environment". My husband, myself and other affected landowners know that this project will certainly affect the human environment and violate a number of thresholds that preclude the project from CE status. Therefore, we request that Mystic Ranger District Ranger reconsider his prior assumption and deem this project not fit for CE.

The proposed project area encompasses at least four of the seven resource conditions that warrant an Environmental Analysis (EA) or EIS. The majority of our property consists of North Fork Castle Creek's wetlands and riparian meadows, including several springs that feed into North Fork Castle Creek, which are not mentioned in the project's maps. We are concerned about the effect any drilling or mining will have on the watershed, water quality and water table. As these springs and wetlands are very sensitive, we would like further information as to the effects drilling will have on this hydrological system, which contributes to Rapid City's municipal water source.

Further, any drilling or future mining would disrupt the intact ecosystem that extends along the North Fork Castle Creek Research Area and through our property, home to elk, bobcat, deer, mink, mountain lion, varieties of fish and birds of prey. I urge the Forest Service to consider the documentation of wildlife in the area that will be affected by the project's drilling and any future mining, which we will privately submit to the NEPA representative.

When my husband and I bought the Reynolds Stage Stop property in 2018, much of it was in deteriorating condition with structures dating back to the 1800s. We have invested large amounts of time and resources into repairing the property with its historical integrity. This work was recognized when the Joseph Reynolds Ranch Yard and Stage Stop was accepted as a Historic District into the National Historic Registry in 2022. It's important to us that this historic district is preserved for the beauty and history of the Black Hills it provides to future generations. As the project's northern unit borders our property and drill site 7 is less than 200 ft from our property, I am surprised that there has been no consultation with us nor consideration of the impacts the project will have on the historic value of our historic district and additional areas affected by the project. As landowners, I

request that we be consulted on the project's historical and cultural impacts.

I oppose any drilling or mining in the Upper Rapid Creek Watershed. However, if the Forest Service continues to consider Pete Lien and Sons Rochford Mineral Exploration Project, it is important to recognize that this project does not qualify for CE and an EIS must be made available to all affected stakeholders, including us landowners, the Tribes, and those relying on Rapid Creek's watershed for potable water.

Attached you will find the nomination for Joseph Reynolds Ranch Yard and Stage Stop to the National Register of Historic Places, which was accepted in September 2022.

Danelle Conrad