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Comment in Opposition to Pete Lien & Sons Rochford Mineral Exploratory Drilling Project (#67838)

Submitted by: Kamimila Bettelyoun, Oglala Lakota Woman

I write in strong opposition to the proposed Rochford Mineral Exploratory Drilling Project (#67838) of Pe' Sla, a sacred site of immense cultural, spiritual, ecological, and legal significance to the Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota Nations as well as other various tribes of this country.

Pe' Sla, known as "The Heart of Everything That Is," remains a central site in our creation stories, star knowledge, and ceremonial lifeways. It is not only sacred but actively used today for prayer, ceremony, and cultural continuity. The land is not empty, nor is it forgotten-it is alive with meaning and memory.

#### Legal Violations

This proposed mining project would constitute an ongoing violation of the 1868 Fort Laramie Treaty, which guaranteed ownership of the Black Hills-including Pe' Sla-to the Sioux Nation. Though the U.S. government illegally seized this land in 1877, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in *United States v. Sioux Nation of Indians* (1980) that the taking was unjust and acknowledged it as one of the most dishonorable acts in American history. The Court awarded compensation, which the Sioux Nation has never accepted because Pe' Sla and the Black Hills are not for sale. Drilling here would perpetuate this historical injustice and ignore existing legal precedent and ethical responsibility.

#### Cultural and Spiritual Significance

The spiritual connection to Pe' Sla predates colonization and persists today. This place is our ceremonial ground, a site where we maintain our connection to Unci Maka (Grandmother Earth), Wakan Tanka (the Great Mystery), and our ancestors. Disturbing this site for short-term mineral profit is not just harmful-it is desecration.

In 2012, tribal nations-including the Rosebud, Crow Creek, and Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux-raised \$9 million to reacquire private parcels of Pe' Sla, reintroducing bison and restoring the land. These are not symbolic gestures. They are acts of sovereignty, healing, and stewardship. This land is protected, loved, and actively maintained. To ignore this is to erase Indigenous presence and agency.

#### Environmental Concerns

The proposed mining site is near the headwaters of Rapid Creek, a critical water source for humans and wildlife. Mineral exploration-especially involving drilling and road construction-carries high risks of contamination, erosion, and disruption of fragile habitats. Water is life, and this project endangers vital ecosystems, biodiversity, and downstream communities.

Pe' Sla supports a rich diversity of fauna, flora, and traditional medicines. Any damage to this habitat threatens cultural foodways, plant-based healing practices, and the balance of the natural world we all depend on.

#### Moral and Societal Responsibility

We are in a time of climate crisis, water scarcity, and environmental collapse. Extractive industries driven by

corporate greed continue to prioritize profit over people, poisoning land and water, fueling inequality, and accelerating ecological destruction. We cannot afford to repeat the mistakes of the past.

As an Oglala Lakota woman, I appeal to your moral consciousness. We all have a responsibility to act in defense of life-human and non-human, present and future. This is not just a Native issue; it is a human issue. We must look in the mirror and ask what kind of world we are creating. What legacy are we leaving?

#### A Call to Justice and Unity

The prophecy of the Red Nation rising is not about domination. It is about healing. It is a vision of unity, of people from all backgrounds recognizing the sacredness of Earth and standing together against systems that exploit and divide us. It is about returning to balance, justice, and community. The proposed drilling at Pe' Sla would not only threaten the health of the land and water, but also further divide us and undermine the potential for reconciliation and a better future.

#### Conclusion

The Forest Service and all governing bodies involved must reject this proposal out of respect for treaty law, the ecological integrity of the region, and the living cultural and spiritual practices of the Lakota people. No mineral resource is worth more than clean water, cultural survival, or legal accountability. The land is sacred. The treaties are the supreme law of the land. Honor them.

Protect Pe' Sla. Protect the Earth. Protect our future.

This is not just a decision about one project or one site-it is a decision that reflects our collective values and sets precedent for the future. The continued exploitation of sacred lands, disregard for treaty rights, and harm to Mother Earth will not remain isolated. These actions ripple outward, affecting ecosystems, communities, and the planet we all share. It's time to stop this systemic oppression.

To those in positions of power: I ask you to pause and reflect deeply. What kind of world do you want your children and grandchildren to inherit? If we continue down this path of unchecked extraction and disregard for the Earth's limits, there may be no livable world left for them. At some point, enough is enough. This is that point.

You have the power to choose a different way-to respect Indigenous rights, to honor the sacred, and to protect the natural systems that sustain all life. Let this be a turning point where we choose balance over greed, healing over harm, and unity over division. Let us begin today to walk a new path rooted in justice, humility, and care for all our relations.