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Comments: The Water Protector Legal Collective ("WPLC") submits this public comment to the U.S. Forest Service ("USFS") in opposition to the Ponderosa Exploration Drilling Project #64551 ("the Project"). The WPLC is an Indigenous-led legal non-profit law firm and advocacy organization dedicated to providing legal support and advocacy for Indigenous Peoples and Original Nations, the Earth, and climate justice movements in the United States and internationally.

The Ponderosa Exploration Drilling Project is set to take place on unceded Treaty lands of the Oceti Šakówi? (Seven Council Fires of the Lakota/Dakota/Nakota, also known as the Great Sioux Nation) in the ?e Sápa (Black Hills). Solitario, the owner and operator of the Project, calls this an exploration, while also maintaining the Project is just the start to create a new mining project that will put water, cultural resources, and the economy at risk.

The proposed Ponderosa Exploration Drilling Project should not be approved to move forward because: (1) there is a lack of environmental compliance and the inappropriate use of the categorical exclusion; (2) this project would be unnecessarily damaging to the environment; (3) the USFS has an obligation to protect Treaty rights and protect Indigenous Peoples' cultural resources; and (4) this project is not in the best interests of the surrounding communities.