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First name: Denise

Last name: Giago

Organization:

Title:

Comments: To: US Forest Service

Re: Ponderosa Exploratory Drilling Project

Denise Giago

I am writing to formally express my strong disapproval of the Ponderosa Exploratory Drilling Project. My name is Denise Giago. I am an enrolled member of the Oglala Lakota Nation. I reside, work, practice my traditional spirituality, gather medicinal plants, and engage in recreational activities within the Black Hills.

To begin, I'd like to express my deep sadness at seeing the continued increase of proposed drilling and mining projects across the sacred He Sapa. I believe that, especially in recent years, residents of the Black Hills area have made our position clear: We do not want any more mining or mining exploration in the Black Hills.

If community members and tribal members had their way, these projects would be halted, and a Black Hills-wide mineral withdrawal would be implemented. This is what the people want. We want to protect our beautiful Black Hills, our precious water, and all our diverse, rare, and unique flora and fauna.

As Tribal members, we want our traditional lifeways, which are inherently intertwined with the land, to be honored and protected. As residents, we want to enjoy the Black Hills for all its beauty, serenity, and recreational opportunities. We recognize that the local economy benefits significantly from recreation and tourism, rather than from the extractive industries that continue to operate illegally on unceded treaty territory, compromising our land and water for the profit of a few.

Mining companies will claim that South Dakota is very permissive for mining. However, the only thing truly permissive is the outdated 1872 Mining Act, supported by the Forest Service's willingness to enforce this illegal law, which was designed to displace the Oceti Sakowin, also known as the Seven Council Fires or the Great Sioux Nation, from our traditional homelands.

The He Sapa is sacred to the Lakota People, and the proposed project area is no exception. All mining in the Black Hills is illegal under the Fort Laramie Treaty of 1868. Tribal consultation on this project was inadequate, and the Forest Service is required to do full and meaningful tribal consultation on treaty land.

This project would disrupt tourism and recreation that attract millions of people (and generate billions of dollars) each year to the Black Hills. The Plan of Operations states that the drilling would occur between June and October, which is, of course, the peak of the tourism season.

Spearfish Canyon is a National Historic Scenic Byway that attracts travelers from all over the nation and the world. The project area is located in one of the most beautiful and actively visited regions in the Northern Hills, with numerous popular trailheads nearby. This area also includes 4.5 acres designated as a botanical "garden" area. The Botanical Gardens were established to encourage thousands of visitors and residents to appreciate and respect the natural environment. Near the project site is Hanna Campground, a very popular spot for tourists and locals. This area serves as an elk migration corridor and is also a popular hunting destination.

The Ponderosa Exploratory Drilling project would undoubtedly disrupt local wildlife and habitats, including species unique to this area, such as the long-eared bat, which is currently listed as an endangered species.

The project area is within the Redwater River watershed, specifically Spearfish Creek, which runs through the

canyon and flows into the Redwater River.

Residents of Spearfish would potentially be subjected to 24-hour lighting and noise 5-7 days a week, disrupting the peace, quiet, and beauty that draw people to the area. This drilling would also be disruptive because the project's border lies 1.1 miles from tribally controlled land that is used ceremonially throughout the year.

Additionally, it is an insult to our community's intelligence for Solitario to claim this is merely "exploration" rather than an effort to start another full-scale mining project, especially for those living so close to the scars of the Wharf Mine and Homestake. We are already aware of the safety hazards and water quality risks associated with such projects. Mining is part of the area's past, and it should stay there. The Black Hills have already lost enough.

Furthermore, gold is not a critical mineral. It is exported mainly for investment and jewelry purposes. Gold is also easily recyclable. There is simply no NEED to extract more minerals, like gold or silver, from the earth.

This project will require hundreds of thousands of gallons of water sourced from municipal supplies, as stated in the POO. Which specific sources will be used? Again, an invaluable resource that, in these times of long, dry seasons and a growing population, is simply a waste.

For all these reasons, I support the Spearfish Community's resolution to oppose this project, and I request a comprehensive Environmental Impact Statement be conducted. I also ask that the comment period be extended to 60 days to allow more community members to participate, especially since this comment period opened on the holiday weekend of Summer Solstice.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,
Denise Giago