

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 3/1/2023 7:00:00 AM

First name: Karen

Last name: Henman

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Mr. Hoelscher,

Re: F3 Gold LLC, Newark Drilling Exploration Project

The news of drilling in my back yard has come as such a shock, it truly leaves me reeling. Who would think that drilling would be allowed within a half mile of private land and residences? It makes one wonder also if the extreme deforestation done back there was to prepare for drilling in the future, but we weren't made aware. We received our notice of this drilling project 3 days before the public meeting, yet this has been in the works since at least 2020? It seems we could have been advised earlier so we could have begun actions to protect our public lands sooner. First and foremost I have concern for the environment. This is bald eagle habitat, as well as an elk migration path, and habitat to deer, mountain lions, marmots, bats, and more. All of these animals were displaced during the massive logging project a few years ago and have now again found sanctuary there. Since the deforestation, the landscape has changed dramatically. What was an adventurous hike is now a treacherous walk over branches and limbs and through huge patches of thistle that grew wherever the land was disturbed by equipment. The Black Hills are known as a geological paradise, true. There is nothing like it in the world. But, it is sacred land not only to the Natives but also to those who were born here or even drawn here by its magical powers. My grandparents homesteaded at Nemo. I was born here. The hills are sacred to me. Black Hills National Forest is approximately 1.2 Million acres with now 288,000 acres of mining claims against it! How is it possible that we allow such insanity? Who protects the forest? This is our sanctuary, our place to escape and enjoy the wilderness. For the Natives, it's a place to hold ceremonies and connect with their ancestors. Non-natives find a spiritual connection as well. Paha Sapa means "the heart of everything that is." This land is life giving, spirit sustaining, and precious to all those who love it. We have a moral obligation to protect the sanctity of the Black Hills for future generations! French Creek and all of our small aquifers must be protected. We have limited water resources and have suffered through drought after drought these last few years. KOTA TV ran a newscast on February 17th about concern for water to keep up with the influx of people migrating to the hills. This influx puts a huge strain on our resources. A plan is in the works to pump water from the Missouri River about 200 miles to the Black Hills. It will take decades of planning, fundraising, and analysis and is expected to take 20-30 years to complete. Western Dakota Regional Water System estimates this will cost billions of dollars. We do not have water to spare for mining projects! We have major concern for the integrity of our wells and the quality of our drinking water should drilling and mining ensue. Cyanide, Mercury, and other toxic chemicals are used to extract gold from rock. There is no way to completely contain it so that our wells and aquifers will not be poisoned. Last I knew poisoning people was illegal, let alone wildlife. Think Camp LeJuene, or the train wreck in Ohio. The fallout is immeasurable. There has been notice that the exploratory drilling will take place 24 hours a day for over a year! Again, this is a half mile, maybe closer, from residences. How is that not by itself prohibitory? How will that not impact the landscape and wildlife in this area? I demand a complete Environmental Impact Study be done before any permits are issued for any mining project in the Black Hills. What else do they have planned and where? There needs to be more transparency and public awareness. Finding out 3 days before a public meeting and just weeks before comment deadline is not acceptable. We have concern for the structural integrity of our foundations with 24 hour a day drilling 1000's of feet below the surface and the traffic of all the huge equipment that it will take. We have great concern for noise pollution as well. We bought here for sanctuary, for peace, and privacy. And we are being taxed to death in property taxes due to the influx of people, just to have our homes potentially devalued by these mining projects IN OUR BACK YARDS! It has been shown that Tourism brings in far more money than mining ever will, 4+ billion a year. Last summer we saw several tourists boondock camping on Was bash Road and back off many of the forest roads surrounding us. Besides our neighborhoods, there are several campgrounds in our area who would be impacted by the noise and traffic. These campgrounds are their livelihood. Traffic is insane during tourist season as millions flock to our hills for vacation. Adding mining equipment traffic to that mix is insanity. The Forest Service already struggles to maintain FS roadways and this

will destroy every road in it's path. In fact, we, the public, are not even allowed access to these FS roads in the winter to protect them and the wildlife. Will the mining companies post low bonds for repairs/restoration then bail on their promises? It happens all the time. Can you return the land to it's previous status? Absolutely not. It will never be the same. Billions of years of geography and geology will be destroyed. The 1872 Mining Law that has allowed this nonsense to progress needs to be addressed and revoked immediately. I have nothing against hobby mining but corporate mining has no place in our precious Black Hills. Lastly, who protects the forest? If it is not the Forest Service, then perhaps we need to design a new entity that has concern for our precious public lands and those it belongs to. It totally blows my mind that I have to write a letter to beg for our public lands to be protected. We cannot and must not prostitute our Black Hills for profit! I await your thoughtful reply. Most sincerely concerned,