

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 3/23/2023 6:00:00 AM

First name: Jolena

Last name: Pang

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Hi, here is my comment regarding the categorical exclusion:

I am a *redacted* year old named Jolena Pang who recently took up residence in the Southern Black Hills in South Dakota, near Custer. I am an Environmental Biologist with a degree in Environmental Biology from Washington University in Saint Louis and a history working for environmental NGOs. I am writing today to voice my opinion that the Newark Project needs a full environmental assessment and is not appropriate for a categorical exclusion. The Southern Black Hills is a precious and unique ecological area that needs to be protected, and this project would threaten the wildlife and people in the area in an unacceptable way.

This is not a small project-- 390 drill holes or anything close to that is enough to cause significant damage and disruption to the ecosystem. We all know how gold mining requires chemicals that can and have leaked into and contaminated water bodies, and this proposed site happens to be upstream from Custer, a city that has many families with young children, and a city that heavily depends on environmentally-related tourism.

This project also requires construction of more than 1/3rd mile of road and clearing of over an acre of ground. The black hills are already a small ecosystem unlike any found in the world. The land holds a unique combination of the ecologies of the Rocky Mountains, Great Plains, northern boreal forests, and eastern deciduous forests. There are endemic species, or species that exist only in this region and nowhere else in the world, like the white-winged junco, Cooper's rocky mountain snail, a black hills red-bellied snake, and a southern red-backed vole, among others. Once these animals are gone, there is no getting them back. This planet was created for humans and other animals, too, and by drilling and chopping and destroying these forests, we are not treating our planetary neighbours, or our plants and animals with whom we share this earth, with respect. Risking the health of the planet is very obviously the wrong thing to do. I understand that people need jobs and want resources, but those can be found and created in so many other, more meaningful places and ways. Please do not ignore this seemingly obvious fact.

Regardless of how you feel about plants and animals, to allow this project to go through would also be detrimental to our fellow humans, in Custer and all surrounding areas, and arguably to the whole world. A contaminant that falls in the water of French Creek in South Dakota can get deposited there or flow all the way to the Pacific Ocean. We are all connected, and so we must be fully aware of our impact, and we must make sure we are not causing damage or spreading harm in the form of contamination or toxins, like those that this project would be using.

This project is not appropriate for a categorical exclusion, and even if 390 drill holes is somehow considered a small project, the company wants a larger one as indicated by their original plan, and this small one just gets their foot in the door. Therefore, the cumulative impacts are not described. Let's also please remember what a large incentive this company would have to not be fully honest about potential or guaranteed impacts.

Thank you for taking my comment into consideration. I hope you decide in the interests of the people and the planet.