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First name: Kris
Last name: Anderson
Organization:
Title:
Comments: I strongly oppose any approval for exploratory drilling in the Custer area of the Black Hills National Forest for potential gold mining - or any other reason, for that matter. The national forests were set aside for preservation of portions of this fragile planet for the benefit of the other species - animal, vegetable and mineral - from our rapacious endeavors. We do not have adequate control on our population, nor our greed and insensitivity to consequences of our actions, thus the creation of these buffer zones. The Mission statement for national parks is firstly to protect the other species, providing them a safe home from human beings. The process of drilling will create a severely damaged footprint on any acreage explored, and on many acres, that will scar the land for generations. A simple example of the effect exploration will have is the tracks still visible across this country of the old covered wagons trekking west. Those wheels weren't wide, but they left their mark to this day and forward. Processes used for proposed drilling will leave a vastly wider deadly footprint. And this foot in the door for future actual mining would lead to further destruction of ever wider deadly consequences.

If caring for other species is off your range of interest, then consider the threat to our own. It will take huge amounts of water just for the drilling process. Only a few years ago the town of Keystone, SD shut down an exploration for gold in its vicinity as toxins began to show in the town's water supply. That's a precedent for what has gone and is to come if you approve this. Another precedent is the protest by the Rapid City Council regarding the Jenny Gulch exploration. Surely that learned group understands the deadly outcome for the water resources for Rapid City. Fall River County has put in place a legislative mechanism to trigger protection of their waters against future such proposals. Even if you can't see the correlation of our interdependence with the rest of the biota, surely you can see that direct deadly consequence on our own species.

The Mining Act of 1872 is outdated in its intent for many reasons - for modern methods, for our knowledge and understanding today of our planet and life versus what was known and understood at that point in time. It is in direct opposition to the ideology of creating park systems. While the Mining Act still exists, there is an accumulating body of knowledge and action that negate its validity. It needs to be re-evaluated. Meanwhile an EIS needs to be performed regarding this proposal.

Examine the financial impact for this proposal. According to geologists knowledgeable of the local rock formations, the rock formations in the Custer area are not at all promising for gold. The exploration proposed by the drilling business(es) is merely a ploy to draw money from potential investors, a mere pyramid scheme to line pockets for a relatively short period that is unjustified for any actual result. Now consider the local financial impact. As a property owner and tax payer, I deplore the current skyrocketing land values in the area. However, homes and the real estate businesses in the area will surely be impacted negatively by this pointless proposal. If we kill off the forests, we kill off our own local enjoyment of their use for recreation - and tourism as a huge local money-maker is part of that overall concern. There is little to gain and everything to lose.

Kris Anderson