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March 1, 2023

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HNF/SO

District Ranger  
1019 N. 5<sup>th</sup> St.  
Custer, SD 57730

Dear Rob Hoelscher,

I am writing to express concerns about the proposed Newark Gold Exploration Project. I believe it is imperative that an environmental impact statement be made before any work is started on this project. I think a 'categorical exclusion' makes no sense when those of us who will be directly impacted have so many questions and concerns about how this project will impact our lives and our most precious resource, our water.

We have lived in Custer most of our lives--in the Black Hills 54 years, most of those years in Custer. In 1975 my husband and I purchased land on Little Italy Road. Our well on the land is 110 feet deep. Our son and daughter-in-law have lived in that home since 2003 and raised their children there. The well still works. Depending on the year, the bottom of the Little Italy drainage has often filled and flooded. The well water gets sludgy then, but eventually clears.

I remember when West Dam was so full that one summer there was a water-skiing show on the dam! Hard to imagine when you see the overgrown swampy area there now. However, we know that area can flood because in July of 2019, homes in town along French Creek were flooded, propane tanks were washed east of town toward Harbach Lane and I believe a calf drowned. Some of those homes received extensive damage and I recall that Custer city purchased two homes that were then razed.

My husband and I now live off Willow Creek Rd. just a short distance from the Custer city lagoons. There is extensive work going on there now and water is being diverted. People we know who live downstream from this project have expressed legitimate concerns, mainly having to do with the safety of their water.

There are already many concerns about water safety in Custer and the surrounding area. This exploratory project finds itself in the center of existing concerns. There are so many worries about how this drilling will take place and how it will affect the area. And what will happen if gold is found and mining proceeds. The area northwest of Custer is more pristine than most of the Hills and more precious because of that. I often think of what a wise friend, Bob Burden, said about the Black Hills, "Once it's gone, it's gone." He was talking about mankind's effect on the area and how so many of those changes are not reversible.

Please remove the 'categorical exclusion' label from this project and begin the process for an Environmental Impact Statement. Hundreds (or more) of us are deeply concerned.

Thank you, Marianne Fridell  
[REDACTED]