

March 1, 2023

Rob Hoelscher
District Ranger, US Forest Service Black Hills National Forest
1019 N. 5th Street
Custer, SD 57730

MAR 3 2023

RE: Newark Exploration Drilling Project

We are writing to express our strong opposition to the proposed **F3 Gold** mining project in the Black Hills National Forest at Custer, SD. This project poses serious threats to our Black Hills environment, our wildlife, and our economy. Listed below are a few of our concerns.

First, it is highly concerning that the company proposing the mining project has not provided an environmental impact study (EIS). This is not a small project, having the potential to drill 390 holes it will take multiple years. The US Forest Service indicates this project is slated to move forward under a categorical exclusion, which is not appropriate for this project. EIS is a crucial document that outlines the potential effects of the project on the environment. Potential future drilling should be described and assessed now, before this project is considered. As concerned citizens, I demand that the company provide this study so that an informed decision can be made about the future of our community.

Second, the mining activities are likely to pollute the French Creek, as well as local wells, all of which are essential sources of drinking water for people and habitats of various species. This could have disastrous consequences for the health of our community and the local ecosystem.

Third, the mining project would lead to the destruction of trees and habitats of wildlife, which will have long-term effects on the biodiversity of the area. Mining uses and contaminates huge amounts of water, emits large amounts of carbon, and displaces other activities. The Black Hills is a recharge area for the Madison Aquifer. Past mining in the Black Hills has contaminated some rivers all the way to the Missouri River.

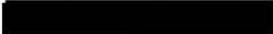
The noise pollution from the mining operations, which are proposed to run 24 hours per day, will also disturb the natural habitats of various species. If you've ever tried to get work done to the soundtrack of a jack hammer then you know that background noise can hamper everyday activities. Humans, however, aren't the only ones impacted by noise (defined as *unwanted and/or harmful sound*). Since many animals rely on their sense of sound for survival, they are particularly vulnerable to the problems that noise pollution can cause, leading to the displacement of many species, including as far away as the bats of Jewel Cave.

Moreover, as noted in the Forest Service Land and Resource Management Plan, the Black Hills is a top tourist destination for our country. The project's impact on our local economy is likely to be negative, as it is expected to reduce the number of tourists visiting the area. This will have a ripple effect on businesses that rely on tourism, such as hotels, restaurants, and shops. Current county roads are not suitable for heavy equipment traffic. This will also lead to a decline in property values, which will hurt homeowners.

We are also asking for you to consider the Lakota Treaty Rights by conducting a meaningful tribal consultation. Remembering that in 1980 U.S. Supreme Court opinion described the theft of the Black Hills from the "Sioux Nation of Indians." The court awarded the tribe \$102 million; today, with the accumulated interest, it comes to nearly \$2 billion. Additionally, noted in the Forest Service Land and Resource Management Plan mineral production will be in accordance with the 1872 mining act. Under Goals and Objectives, Goal #1 is to "Protect basic soil, air, water and cave resources".

In conclusion, we are urging everyone to join us in opposing the F3 Gold mining project in Custer, SD. We must protect our environment, our wildlife, our native lands and our economy from the potential harm that this project may cause.

Respectfully submitted,


Lonnie White and Lisé White



CC:

- Governor Kristi Noem
- Lieutenant Governor Larry Rhoden
- Secretary of State Monae Johnson
- Attorney General Marty Jackley
- School and Public Lands Commissioner Brock Greenfield
- US Senator John Thune
- US Senator Mike Rounds
- US Representative Dusty Johnson
- State Senator Julie Frye-Mueller
- State Representative Dennis Krull
- State Representative Trich Ladner
- Center for Biological Diversity
- Bureau of Land Management
- Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Steven R. Jensen