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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Subject: Jenny Gulch Gold Exploration Drilling Project Objection

To Whom It May Concern:

I submitted comments regarding this proposed exploration project during the original EA scoping and comment period, as such I am incredibly unhappy with the outcome and respectfully object to the Finding of No Significant Impact. The reasons for my objections are as follows:

1). The Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) appears to have been based on the short-lived NEPA regulations that were enacted by the former Executive Branch in 2020. New rules were published in April 2022, taking effect in May 2022 which makes it very clear that more than one alternative is required pursuant to 40 CFR 1501.5(a)(2). This decision of FONSI is not compliant with the May 2022 regulations and therefore a new scoping period or more ideally a complete EIS is appropriate for this situation.

2) The scoping project failed to conduct meaningful Tribal Consultation and provide access to tribal officials. This area has traditionally been used by multiple tribes for generations for multiple uses including the gathering of medicinal plants, hunting, and religious ceremonies. Failure to consult all 7 Tribal entities prior to the finding of FONSI does not meet the statutory requirements.

3) The FONSI fails to adequately incorporate the impacts of the 24/7 operations of this project on the human residents of the adjacent land including Silver City. The project will involve using water trucks and other heavy equipment being hauled into the drill sites on Silver City Road. The 24/7 drilling operations will at a minimum require 2 labor shifts with shift change traffic impacting this road which is the single point of access to this community. A full EIS is required to determine how this traffic will impact the community and roads. Additionally, these residents rely upon private wells for drinking water. Sentinel monitoring and water quality analysis during the project need to be included to safeguard the community's residents. This justifies a full EIS and directly disputes the FONSI.

4) Section 5.2 subpoint 2 ignores a critical concern for downstream water users of Pactola Reservoir and the aquifer recharge that occurs downstream from the exploration project. The project has the potential to impact public safety. Neither of the water treatment facility intakes for the City of Rapid City downstream from this project has real-time sentinel monitoring in place. The potential for the project to impact downstream water users is not inconsequential and therefore the FONSI is not adequate.

5) Alternative C's accommodations to the Bighorn Sheep Lambing area are not adequate or appropriate. The lambing season often extends outside of May 1 to June 15th in recent years due to variations in weather patterns and habitat impacts due to the extended drought being experienced in Western SD and the Black Hills. The FONSI fails to recognize that any major disturbances in the area during the lambing and initial rearing periods will have direct impacts on the animals that historically occupy and use this area.

6). The FONSI failed to address my comments regarding species of concern that are present in this area specifically Northern Goshawks which nest in this area and smooth green snakes which are present and prevalent in the riparian areas where drilling operations are planned under this project. A full EIS would include a survey of these species of concern and determine project impacts on their habitat.

7). The FONSI failed to address how this project will impact the recreational activities in the Jenny Gulch access

point of Pactola Reservoir. This area is heavily utilized year around by both residents and visiting tourists to the Black Hills. The exploratory drilling project will have impacts to access, recreation quality (especially noise pollution), and traffic. This area has a single point of road access the FONSI's failure to address these impacts is a substantial and massive miss. At a minimum, a full EIS is needed to address these concerns.

8). The original scoping documents fail to specify the exact type of drilling equipment that will be utilized in the project. The project originators have substantial financial entanglements with companies that are developing new drilling technologies and the FONSI will allow experimental drilling technology to be utilized in a sensitive area. This is not acceptable.

The sum of the objections and the failures and omissions in the original scoping project is large enough that a full EIS for this project should be completed.

Best,
Justin Herreman