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Title:
Comments: My name is Nathan Steele, and I've lived in Custer my entire life. I oppose the Newark Exploratory Drilling Project, and any exploratory drilling in the area for that matter, for several reasons.
First, operations for exploratory drilling and subsequent mining will harm the vital and growing tourism and recreation industries upon which many people in the area make a living. The mining industry in the area is minuscule in comparison. This project would negatively impact the one-of-a-kind and irreplaceable natural resources which attract millions of visitors each year. These visitors, as well as residents, also expect clean, safe water, which brings me to my next point.
Second, when this company finds gold, they will want to sell their claims to gold mining companies. Gold mining will introduce hazardous materials such as cyanide and arsenic to our area. We don't want more Superfund sites which already exist in the northern Black Hills due to mining activity. People deserve clean and safe water. It is the job of the Forest Service and the BLM to be good stewards of our natural resources on federal lands. Progressing with this project is reckless, short-sighted and irresponsible stewardship. A categorical exclusion would not be appropriate and an environmental assessment as well as an environmental impact statement must be conducted. Even just a few drops of fuel for the company's equipment is enough contaminate hundreds of liters of water. We shouldn't take that chance.
Third, the area of proposed drilling is of great cultural importance. Not only does the drilling take place nearby the homes of many people, but it also takes place on the ancestral lands of Indigenous Tribes. Irreplaceable cultural artifacts and materials may be destroyed due to this project. People in the area, especially Indigenous people, have a strong connection to this land. Why should an out-of-state company be able to destroy the public lands for profit and leave residents with the ugly and dangerous effects of their presence?
For the above reasons, I strongly oppose the drilling project and would like to see an environmental assessment and environmental impact statement done before the project goes any further.