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Comments: This letter is sent to protest the Newark Exploratory Drilling Project in the Black Hills. The project is not an appropriate use of the Black Hills and should not be allowed.

Also, why has no Environmental Assessment (EA) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) been prepared as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)? The use of a Categorical Exclusion for this project is not appropriate. The Categorical Exclusion examples cited 36 CFR 220.6(e)(8) are for much less intrusive projects such as geomagnetic surveys, trenching, clearing vegetation, or repairing existing roads. Instead, this project is an intrusive project that has the potential to impact the surrounding population, businesses and a large area of the southern Black Hills. Extraordinary circumstances include but are not limited to potential impact to wildlife, nearby residences, recreational uses and the City of Custer, which depends upon tourism for its economy. Other potential issues and concerns which must be addressed include but are not limited to the following:

Will the project conform with local planning, Comprehensive Plans, or zoning? What about conformance with the Black Hills National Forest Management Plan?

What is the impact of the investigative derived waste, such as drill cuttings and wastewater, which is apparently not being tested but instead is just going to be dumped on the ground? The waste and wastewater must be containerized and shipped off-site to a State authorized disposal facility.

Has there been an erosion study for each of the pads to determine the impact of heavy equipment and drill cuttings including the suitability of the soils and possible erosion?

What noise levels will be generated? What is the impact of 24/7 drilling for months on end on the community, wildlife and nearby residences, hunting, recreation and other forest uses? Why is the drilling not being limited to 8 hours a day, five days a week? What is the number of personnel, vehicles, and drilling rigs necessary for the project to install numerous drilling sites spread over several miles?

What will the impact be on local air quality and community pollution levels? These are large pieces of equipment with diesel motors. Will there be any ambient air or water testing or monitoring?

Will there be visual impact from the height of the drill rig or the movement of large vehicles in and out of the forest? What impact will the equipment have on local, county and state roads?

What is the impact to storm water runoff, local aquifers, drinking water supplies or public safety?

Are there any cultural impacts?

The Newark Exploratory Drilling Project is not an appropriate use of the Black Hills and the project is not suitable for a Categorical Exclusion, which bypasses the protections of NEPA and the Environmental Impact process and effectively excludes the public from site-specific decisions, reduces transparency, and removes incentives for the agency to avoid harming localized resources.