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Comments: The purpose of this letter is to oppose the Forest Service's approval of the F3 Mining Newark Gold exploration project West of Custer. Further, to state my position that a full Environmental Assessment and/ or an Environmental Impact Study be done along with a Cultural Property Survey. The results of both of these need to be made public and open meetings need to be conducted with the appropriate parties from the Forest Service, BLM, F3 Mining, Native Americans Tribes, and local residents.

Below are my specific reasons for opposing the proposed Newark Gold Exploration Project West of Custer and any future gold mining operations that might result from that exploration:

1. There are a significant number of private homes in the area West of Custer with more being built every year. The proposed area is near and adjacent to some of these. These homes all have water wells that pull water from fissures and lenses in the rock below. It is unknown what the impact of drilling numerous holes 1 to 2 thousand feet deep near these might be. If something were to happen to contaminate the wells with heavy metals or poisonous compounds it is unlikely anything could be done to reverse the impact. Further, the noise of the heavy equipment used to prepare the drilling sites and for drilling will impact these homeowners. It is my position that the project should not proceed because of its proximity to private homes and land.

2. The proposed area for exploration is not far from French Creek and drainage areas that feed it. All creeks and streams are very fragile ecosystems, especially in a semi-arid area like the Southern Black Hills. The potential damage to this ecosystem is unknown. Remediation may be possible if something were to happen, but it cannot completely restore it. This creek runs through public land, private property, the City of Custer, and Custer State Park. Again, if something were to happen to contaminate any surface water creeks with heavy metals or poisonous compounds it would impact these areas. It is my position that the project should not proceed because of the potential impact on surface water creeks that flow out of the proposed exploration area.

3. The Southern Black hills and specifically the Custer area has been in a moderate drought for several years. F3 has indicated that it needs significant amounts of water to drill the exploratory wells. It may be true that they will not use water from the site of the drilling but it would need to be sourced from a location within a reasonable distance. Taking large amounts of water from wells or lakes that are either on private land or public land in the area could have a negative impact on the supply of drinkable water. For this reason it is my position that the project should not be allowed to proceed.

4. The proposed area of exploration for the Newark project is home to many animals: eagles, hawks, owls, deer, turkey, coyotes, etc. It is also home to the native trees, plants, and grasses. The forest services currently closes the roads in the area for part of the year to limit the damage done by ATVs, boondock camping, and four wheel drive vehicles. The additional traffic of heavy commercial drilling and mining equipment would do significant new damage to this area. F3 has also proposed the addition/extension of primitive roads in the area. This will do new irreversible damage to the area in both the short and far term. I oppose allowing this to happen.

5. Tourism is a major source of revenue for the Black Hills.The area in question is visited by tourists on ATVs and used by boondock campers. The noise and activity of exploratory drilling and certainly of any subsequent future mining will deter people from visiting the area. I oppose the project because of its potential impact on tourism, the area's major revenue source.

6. I did attend the informational meeting held at the Custer High School. I listened to the objections from the regional Native American Tribes. The US Government and its related agencies have a long record of not taking the concerns of the indigenous people seriously especially in the Black Hills area. The project should not proceed until a Cultural Property Survey has been completed on the area and their concerns have been addressed.

7. Also during the meeting it was stated that the mining on public land in the area is regulated in part by a mining act put on the books in 1872. This is from a time when public lands were being exploited and little consideration was given to the impact private operations would have on the environment. Almost certainly no consideration was given to concerns of the indigenous people. More recent government standards for protecting the environment and protecting the rights of the Native Americans should be used to access this project.

I understand that the scope of the Newark project is just to explore for Gold, however the only reason to look for it is to find locations to start a Gold mining operation. The Black Hills of South Dakota are very unique, fragile, and relatively small. For the reasons stated above any many more I urge the Forest Service to do everything in its power to protect it.