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Comments: I am writing to express my concern about the Newark Exploratory Drilling Project #63527. While this is being minimized as just exploratory drilling, no company invests in this kind of project without the hope/intent of expanding it into a full-scale mining project. Let's be realistic, this is just the first step to trying to push through a full-scale mining operation just a couple miles upstream from the town of Custer in the French Creek watershed. The potential impact to both surface and ground water systems must be fully considered and studied. Without this there is no reason to even consider exploratory drilling because the risks to local wells, city water, etc. should all be known. Even this "exploratory" drilling could easily disrupt underground water systems and impact local wells in the area and within the water system that is all connected. The well on our property which is a couple miles south of the proposed exploration site is less 300 ft deep and they are planning to drill at least a couple thousand feet deep in this exploration. How can this not risk disruption of the ground water system? Western South Dakota is now exploring pulling water to this side of the state from the Missouri River. Why would we want to allow further impact to our local water systems knowing that we are facing a shortage already?

In addition to my serious concerns about the water I am also concerned about the impact to the peace and serenity of the area. Increased noise and light pollution will impact all of us in the area decreasing our enjoyment of the local environment. It may also impact tourism. Again, I understand that the "exploration" project would have minimal impact on these things, but the "exploration" only has value if there is potential to develop an operational mine for which the impacts have not been disclosed or discussed.

Rushing this project though under a "categorical exclusion" does not make sense. There is no reason to push this through without a full Environmental Impact Study because understanding the full impact of this project and the subsequent mine in this location could eliminate the need for the "exploration" project. If there is no way that a mine could be introduced into this location without excessive impact on and risk to the local residents, tourism, and town of Custer this project should be blocked.

Yes, I fully understand the need for gold and other resources to continue development of technology and related economic interests. I just do not believe that this is the right place for a mine, so close to the community of Custer. If this is the right place for a mine, then nobody should be afraid to do the environmental impact work since it will be needed anyway and could help allay public fear and concerns. Pushing things through without these considerations disrupts and further erodes public trust.