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Comments: I have owned both residential and agricultural land in Pennington and Custer counties for more than 30 years, and have small businesses in cattle and tourism. I vigorously oppose the United States Forest Service's use of the Categorical Exclusion to avoid conducting both geological and historical impact surveys relative to F3 Gold's Newark prospecting activities in Custer County. I have many concerns, but the main one is water:

*Access to clean drinking water for Black Hills residents is limited and precarious. Hydrology studies need to be done for the specific area F3 wants to explore to both identify and quantify all the water resources for public use and for private wells before the resources are put at risk of pollution from exploration and eventual mining.

*If it is allowed, future mining will require thousands of gallons of water per day per drill hole. No one has explained where that water will come from, whether it will be trucked into the area, and how its use will affect local wells and aquifers. Again, hydrology studies need to be done to protect geological resources, human health, and animal health.

*French Creek is prone to unpredictable flooding such as on August 2, 2019 when a thunderstorm sent French Creek running right through downtown Custer. Had there been containment ponds in use for mining along French Creek, they would have required emergency releases of contaminated water as happened just five years earlier with contaminated water from Wharf containment ponds released into Spearfish Creek.

The Black Hills, including the plant life, animal and human populations, deserve the protection of the US Forest Service. Please remove the Categorical Exclusion designation from F3 Gold Newark's application. Thank you.

Margaret Saunders