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First name: Tom
Last name: OConnor
Organization:
Title:
Comments: The French Creek watershed is an important resource for the area. French Creek flows through the City of Custer, adjacent to trails and a city park and into Stockade Lake, an important recreational lake located in Custer State Park. Groundwater wells located along French Creek provide drinking water for the City of Custer, area residents and local businesses. Surface water runoff from Upper French Creek has immediate impacts on local residents and the City of Custer.

The French Creek watershed supports numerous wildlife. There are potential native American concerns. The scenic nature of the French Creek watershed helps to support area tourism, which is a billion-dollar industry in the Black Hills.

Under current laws, the proposed Newark Exploratory Drilling Project could lead directly to large scale commercial mining upstream of the City of Custer and Custer State Park. There has not been sufficient time to study the potential impact of such mining on the French Creek watershed, the City of Custer, Custer County, Custer State Park and native American concerns.

Prior to any exploratory drilling, a study should be implemented to determine if a moratorium on mineral exploration and extraction is appropriate for the French Creek watershed. Such a study was recently announced by the U.S. Forest Service for portions of the Rapid Creek watershed.
(See Bureau of Land Management and USDA Forest Service Commit to Study Mining Impacts in Pactola Reservoir - Rapid Creek Watershed in the Black Hills, Press Release March 17, 2023).

The situation along French Creek is similar to the situation along Rapid Creek and the two areas should be treated the same. Exploratory drilling and mineral extraction be prohibited in the French Creek watershed until such time as such a study is completed and a determination is made.