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Comments: I am writing regarding the Minnesota-based F3 Gold Newark exploration project in the Black Hills of South Dakota. I was born and raised in the Black Hills and currently live outside Custer, not far from the area of the proposed project.

I believe that the French Creek and Custer area would be harmed by mining operations and there is the potential for harm to the environment from exploratory drilling. If a controversial 1872 General Mining Act restricts the ability of the National Forest Service to deny F3Gold the opportunity to explore for gold, the NFS should at least require a thorough environmental assessment and impact statement and should not grant a categorical exclusion. Why not require a thorough investigation of the impact to French Creek drainage and water supply, roads, wildlife and tourism during the exploration phase? What public benefit exists for a categorical exclusion? Furthermore, I believe an assessment should include the results of research on potential future damage if the results of the exploration were to lead to mining. The area is valuable for tourism, outdoor recreation, wildlife, and a quality of life for residents that would be undermined (!) by a gold operation. Mining in the Northern Hills resulted in heavy metals in water and environmental damage that would harm the French Creek and Custer area.

I have not seen information about the expectations of F3Gold and what would happen should they determine that there is a potential for mining in the NFS property that borders residential areas. I believe that information should be made public so that everyone is aware of potential future consequences before an exploratory project begins. I don't believe that the benefits could possibly outweigh the environmental, economic, and quality of life costs to the area should mining be the result of the exploration.

I hope the NFS will weigh the interests of the public and residents of the area more highly than the private interests of a Minnesota company.