Data Submitted (UTC 11): 4/14/2023 2:33:20 PM
First name: Benjamin
Last name: Haugen
Organization:
Title:
Comments: Hello -
As a local geological engineer and geologist working in the mining industry, I am concerned that the proposed action would set a precedent that could be be harmful to the economy of the Black Hills and, more broadly, to the National Security of the United States. The justification for the proposed action is based on recreational use that much of the Black Hills area has. If much or the entirety of the Black Hills National Forest is eventually classified as a National Recreation Area, it would severely limit our ability to access reserves of critical minerals like lithium and valuable precious metals like gold. Mine exploration, development, and operations directly provide high-paying jobs and they encourage job growth in specialized industries that serve the mining industry.

My experience in the mining industry has also shown me that mining companies are sensitive to environmental issues, and that the mining industry has a vested interest in protecting and preserving the natural resources and recreation areas that people rely on. I also have confidence that low-impact mining methods can be used to minimize the footprint and environmental risk of mining. Moreover, currently the only mining related work being performed in the Pactola-Rapid Creek watershed is exploration and the exploration process has very little impact on the environment.

In my opinion, the environmental risk of current exploration work versus the potential drawbacks of disallowing mining exploration, development, and operations activities in the Pactola-Rapid Creek watershed have not yet been adequately evaluated. I believe that existing environmental regulations and protocols can be used to evaluate environmental risks for any mine that might be developed in the Black Hills, and we should continue to rely on these well-established regulations and protocols rather than take unilateral actions that would prevent any mining activities.