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First name: Caleb

Last name: Leibel

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear Northern Hills Ranger District,

I am writing to express my concerns regarding the Golden Crest Exploration Drilling Project as outlined in the Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) dated May 10, 2023. While I appreciate the transparency provided in the EA, I believe there are significant potential environmental and social impacts that may not have been adequately addressed.

**Ecological Impact:** While the drilling is proposed to take place in previously disturbed areas, the operation's scale and duration could further degrade these sites, affecting the local fauna and flora. The Black Hills National Forest is home to a diverse range of species, some of which are likely already experiencing stress due to past disturbances. Additional disruption could exacerbate these pressures, leading to declines in local biodiversity.

**Water Contamination:** Drilling operations, even exploratory ones, often pose a risk to local water supplies through the potential for spillages and leaks of drilling fluids and other materials. Given the proximity of the proposed drill sites to water sources, this could put both human and ecological health at risk.

**Noise and Light Pollution:** The continuous operation of drilling machinery over 27 months of active drilling could significantly increase noise and light pollution in the area. This could disturb wildlife, particularly nocturnal species, and negatively affect their behaviors, such as breeding and feeding.

**Climate Impact:** The drilling, and subsequent extraction and processing of gold, would contribute to greenhouse gas emissions. In a time when we are globally striving to reduce our carbon footprint, it seems counterproductive to initiate new projects that will contribute to climate change.

**Sustainable Alternatives:** There are more sustainable ways to boost local economies and create job opportunities, such as investing in renewable energy, eco-tourism, or reforestation projects. These alternatives could provide economic benefits without causing significant environmental harm.

**Cultural Impact:** The Black Hills are of great cultural significance to the indigenous peoples of this region. Any additional disturbances or potential degradation of the land should be avoided to respect and preserve these cultural sites and values.

In light of these concerns, I strongly urge the Northern Hills Ranger District to reconsider the Golden Crest Exploration Drilling Project. There are numerous potential environmental, social, and cultural impacts that must be weighed against the short-term economic benefits the project may bring. I believe it is our responsibility to safeguard the Black Hills National Forest for future generations.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Caleb Leibel