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Comments: In reviewing the proposal and provided map area, we have identified several prevalent dilemmas. During this 5-year scoping period for exploration drilling, we have identified issues with the timing of events, such as the Dakota 50, and the parties responsible for ensuring a conflict-free period. We believe that conflicts will arise between drill platforms and the portions of the trail used for the Dakota-50 event, which encompasses numerous National Forest Trails in the Big Hill, Iron Creek, Old Baldy, and Roughlock areas.
Furthermore, the drilling activities encroach upon areas currently utilized under Special Use Permit for grooming Fatbike trails in the Red Lakes area and Iron Creek drainage. We need to consider the impact on special winter projects that require Right of Way (ROW) access.
The Iron Creek drainage is a popular destination year-round for hiking, climbing, mountain biking, fat biking, and snowshoeing. The loss of access to this area would have a significant impact on both local residents and visitors, resulting in a loss of revenue.
Additionally, the drilling process can potentially cause issues with the tributaries of Spearfish Creek mentioned earlier. Water quality problems, damage to ecosystems, including erosion, and the inadvertent contamination of aquifers are all concerns. We need to address what mitigation measures, consequences, and community mediation will be demanded or expected in the event of such occurrences, particularly with regards to the community of Spearfish.
The wildlife inhabiting Spearfish Canyon, such as Mountain Goats, Deer, Elk, and Bighorn Sheep, will be impacted by the presence of loud machinery and vehicles. This disturbance may force these animals into areas that are not typically part of their daily habitat and behavior patterns.
It is important to note that just because mining claims have a historical record of being allowed, it does not necessarily mean that they should continue or be deemed necessary. We must consider the broader implications within the context of the National Forest.
The Black Hills National Forest (BHNF) has limited enforcement powers and faces staffing challenges, resulting in inadequate enforcement across large areas of the forest. Therefore, it is crucial to allocate sufficient time and resources to ensure that the drilling activities align with the proposed plans, adhere to all guidelines, and address any violations in accordance with the law, including appropriate legal actions and prosecutions.
In conclusion, we believe that the exploitation of mining claims is counterproductive and conflicts with the goals and principles of the National Forest on multiple levels.
We recognize the challenging position faced by the BHNF in making these decisions. We can only hope that they will listen to the concerns of the larger community and their neighbors, as this issue directly impacts their backyard