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Comments: Forest Service Staff,

Thank you for allowing everyone to comment on the Golden Crest Explorations Drilling Project. After reading through the EA for this proposed project, I have concerns about the effects the drilling operations could have on the groundwater. The EA states that the Black Hills has a complex underground water system. Wouldn't that make drilling in the area harder to predict the locations of underground water sources and prevent contamination, water exchange, or communication between aquifers? In addition, the EA under 3.5.5.2.1 reads, "Extraction of rock through drilling activities could result in exposing potential sulfide-bearing rock to conditions that lead to the release of acidic runoff and/or metals to runoff or infiltration water." This leads me to believe that contaminating water due to the drilling process is likely.

Another concern is about burying the drill cuttings that come up from the drilling process. What is the total amount of drill cutting from each hole that would be buried? My estimation would be thirteen tons per hole. That is over 300 tons of contaminated soil for the project. How many cuttings pits are proposed for these 25 test wells? The EA states that these drill cuttings will be buried in a lined sump, but under 3.5.6 SOL-01 it says, "plastic liners must be removed from the sump, though biodegradable liners may remain in the sump and be buried." If the liner is removed from the sump, what keeps the liquid from leaching into the ground from the drill cuttings? If a liner is required in the sump, what is the liner thickness, and what is the life expectancy of the liner? The Erosion Control section 2.2.3.3 states that twenty proposed drill sites (out of twenty-five) are located on flat ground with permeable sandy soil. With the potential downpours of rain in the Black Hills, like the ones we experienced this May and June, the overflow of the sump could pose a potential risk of water contamination. Previously in other states where drilling is more frequent, the National Forests and Grasslands have moved away from allowing onsite cutting pits due to the leaching of contaminants into the soil. I recommend that the Forest Services revisit the approval of drill cuttings to be buried onsite. I recommend requiring Solitario to haul the excess drill cuttings to an approved waste disposal site.

Will there be additional water and soil monitoring after Solitario concludes the drilling operations to ensure that future issues don't arise?

I recommend and hope the Forest Service conducts an Environmental Impact Statement for this project to understand better the impacts this project could have on the Environment, Wildlife, and Water in the Northern Black Hills. I know that this proposal is just for the exploration drilling project. Still, I hope we are looking at the big picture of what happens if Solitario finds what they are looking for and the devastating effects it could have on the ecosystem. The Forest Service's motto is: "Caring for the Land and Serving People. I recognize that the Forest Service is obligated to review each proposal submitted. However, I believe this project does not meet the objective of Caring for the Land. The project only serves a few people vs. the surrounding community that opposes it.

Thank you