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Comments: To whom it may concern:

As a former wildlife biologist and someone who is nearly finished with her Master's in Sustainability, I strongly oppose any exploration drilling by Golden Crest in the BHNF. The Golden Crest project, if approved, would drill at approximately 27 sites in locations including Big Hill and surrounding areas that are heavily used for recreational purposes including but not limited to events that generate local income, area that provide many a much-needed escape from the sounds and sights of civilization to aid in the mental health of our community, and that provide wildlife and native pollinators with much needed forested area to maintain species richness and biodiversity. Forests are CRITICALLY important to our NATIVE pollinators which are CRITICALLY important to biodiversity and food production.

Literature has proven native forests support a large number of native forest-dependent species thus making them critically important to local and global pollinator diversity. Many pollinator taxa require or benefit greatly from resources that are restricted to forests, such as floral resources provided by forest plants (including wind-pollinated trees), dead wood for nesting, tree resins, and various non-floral sugar sources.

Loss of too much forest can result in the near-elimination of forest-associated species. Multiple studies have provided strong evidence to show multiple crop types benefit from nearby forest cover with a substantial increase in yields to adjacent forest habitats within the foraging ranges of native pollinators. Other studies suggest forests may have enhanced importance to pollinators in the future given the role of forests in mitigating the negative effects of pesticides and climate change. The current body of knowledge clearly shows any effort to preserve native woody habitats, including the protection of individual trees, will benefit pollinating insects and the crucial services they provide.

Black Hills National Forest makes up a very small portion of South Dakota, however, provides a huge niche habitat no other area in South Dakota can provide for several species including the Black Hills Red-Bellied Snake, Smooth Green Snake, all native Pollinators (the honey bee is not native to the Americas in case anyone at the USFS did not know), Black-backed Woodpecker, and the Black Hills Mountain Snail among many others. If Golden Crest finds what they are looking for, do we really think they will say, "We found it, we can go now!"?? No way, they will want to mine that area. Once habitat is removed and hills are cut away, they cannot be replaced, not even the most brilliantly sophisticated technology can reclaim and restore a mountain top that has been removed or topography that has been changed. If care and concern for the local economy, the mental well-being of our community, and the environment is not enough to convince anyone money is not worth everything, perhaps looking at the impacts to our local watershed might awaken concern. Water is a precious commodity, more so than any mineral one could mine. Without water, we truly have absolutely nothing. Life cannot survive without clean water. If our water sources become contaminated, what will drink? What will we water our crops with? What about the wildlife that drinks contaminated water and becomes contaminated themselves? If it isn't enough to kill them, they will certainly hold toxins in their bodies. Anyone who harvests these animals for consumption puts themselves at risk of also being contaminated. If we can't safely drink the water, how can we safely eat game that consumes the contaminated water? This project has far too many risks.

The Environmental Assessment conducted DID NOT reach a conclusion about the potential impacts of this project AS A WHOLE. It DID, however, IDENTIFY POTENTIAL ADVERSE IMPACTS to water sources, industry, wildlife habitat, and recreation in the area. Without a FULL Environmental Impact Study (EIS), it cannot possibly be known to the fullest extent how damaging the potential adverse impacts the full project would be to all areas (environmental, social, and economic) of what should be a sustainable forest owned by the people. I

believe a full EIS was not conducted because the outcome will show the negative impacts will FAR outweigh any amount of money from mining that would end up in the pockets of very few.

Please do what is right for the greater good and do not allow this or any other exploration drilling or mining to occur in OUR backyard - the Black Hills National Forest.

Respectfully,  
Kelly L. Harnett