

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 6/6/2023 6:26:06 PM

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Comments: As concerned citizens and advocates for environmental conservation, we strongly oppose any exploration drilling activities in the Black Hills. The Black Hills region is not only a significant natural treasure but also holds immense cultural and historical value. Engaging in exploration drilling in this ecologically fragile and culturally significant area would pose grave risks to both the environment and the local communities.

Environmental Impact: The Black Hills region is home to a diverse ecosystem with unique flora and fauna. Any exploration drilling would disrupt and potentially devastate this delicate balance. The extraction and exploration processes involve clearing large areas of land, disturbing habitats, and releasing toxic substances into the environment. This can lead to the loss of biodiversity, irreversible damage to natural resources, and disruption of critical ecological processes.

Water Contamination: The Black Hills region is rich in natural water resources, including rivers, streams, and underground aquifers. Exploration drilling activities pose a significant risk of contaminating these vital water sources through accidental spills, leaks, or seepage of hazardous chemicals used in drilling operations. Such contamination would not only harm wildlife but also jeopardize the availability of safe drinking water for both local communities and wildlife.

Cultural Significance: The Black Hills hold immense cultural and historical significance for indigenous communities, particularly the Lakota Sioux, who consider it a sacred site. Exploration drilling in this area would disrespect and disregard their spiritual beliefs, further marginalizing these already marginalized communities. It is crucial to recognize and honor the rights and heritage of indigenous peoples, ensuring their cultural sites are protected and preserved for future generations.

Tourism and Recreation: The Black Hills region attracts a substantial number of tourists and visitors each year, drawn by its natural beauty and recreational opportunities. Exploration drilling would mar the landscape, diminish scenic vistas, and detract from the unique experience that draws people to this area. The negative impact on tourism would not only harm the local economy but also deprive people of the opportunity to appreciate and learn from the natural wonders the Black Hills offer.

Climate Change Concerns: In the face of the global climate crisis, it is imperative to transition away from fossil fuels and embrace renewable energy sources. Exploration drilling in the Black Hills perpetuates our dependence on non-renewable resources, exacerbating climate change and undermining efforts to achieve a sustainable future. We should prioritize investments in clean energy technologies that promote environmental stewardship and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

In conclusion, exploration drilling in the Black Hills poses unacceptable risks to the environment, cultural heritage, and the well-being of local communities. We urge policymakers, industry leaders, and all concerned individuals to recognize the significance of this unique region and stand against any activities that would harm the natural and cultural treasures of the Black Hills. Let us protect and preserve this precious ecosystem for current and future generations.