

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 6/6/2023 11:29:42 PM

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Comments: The Environmental Assessment identified potential impacts to industries that rely on a healthy forest, recreation, fish and wildlife habitats, and, most critically, water sources. The Spearfish Creek watershed with its associated aquifers, which was identified as potentially being affected by this project, is the source of drinking water for residents in the northern Black Hills.

Some of the materials prepared for this project state "No drilling would occur within Spearfish Canyon" (possibly as an assurance that the canyon won't be impacted?). Spearfish Canyon will absolutely be impacted by drilling in its vicinity through the noise, the disruption of wildlife, the disruption to peaceful recreation, and potential contamination of the Spearfish Creek watershed. Even so, Spearfish Canyon is not the only area of the Black Hills worth protecting. Big Hill, areas along Tinton Road, Little Spearfish, Timon, and Dry Gulch Spring are all treasured places in the Black Hills.

Information in the EA discussed jobs for the project and many in support of the project have listed job growth as one of the reasons for their support. The communities in the northern Black Hills need workforce development and job growth through industries that are enduring and sustainable, not the temporary drilling (and possible later mining) of a finite resource. The only parties who stand to benefit from Solitario's project are their executives and shareholders and the executives of whatever mining company might later buy Solitario's mining claim. The residents of and visitors to the Black Hills will be left in their wake to try to nurture the land back to a healthy forest.

Access to peaceful wilderness is why my family used to visit the Black Hills and why we ultimately chose to live here. Within minutes of our town are trails that measure up to the best trails anywhere. We can gather with friends at Big Hill for year round hiking and biking. We can enjoy peaceful wilderness, an amenity that is becoming more and more rare. The terraced, barren scars from prior mining operations don't have that same tranquil quality. They certainly don't entice tourism, an industry on which the economies of the communities in the Black Hills rely so much.

After reading the EA, I don't know what exploration drilling will do to the local economy or to my ability to access wild spaces or to recreation opportunities or to water sources. And that's the problem. No one knows unless more study is required. The "potential effects" that were identified in the EA need further exploration. The people whose lives will be negatively affected by disruptive drilling and an economic downturn and whose health would suffer from poor quality and quantity of water deserve at least as much study of this project as that required when a group wants to create a dirt trail in the forest. For these reasons, I am asking the Forest Service to require an Environmental Impact Statement for this project.