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Comments: I want to express my opposition to the proposed mineral withdrawal. The withdrawal is not necessary. There are existing regulations in place that assure that any activities within the watershed meet strict environmental standards. This withdrawal is government overreach and sets a dangerous precedent. It is mining this time, but it could be restrictions to development or motorized recreational vehicles in the Black Hills next time. Finally, this withdrawal is in complete opposition to the administrations stated goals for green energy transition/critical minerals supply lines from the DOE/DoD. Removing large tracks of land without understanding the resource potential will have detrimental effects on US green energy transition/state security.

I don't believe any fact-based evidence that hard rock mineral exploration on US Forest Service land has led to environmental and water quality degradation. More importantly, there are much larger issues facing water quality in the Rapid Creek watershed. Three issues that I believe are of the largest concern are water quality impacts of housing developments along the creek, domestic wells, and on-site wastewater systems (septic systems) that are along the creek. These items are of far more concern than the proposed exploration project located inside the withdrawal boundaries. Housing developments require additional roads, water sources, and a means to handle human waste. Exploration drilling is much less invasive than the drilling and installation of water wells: the footprint of the drill rig is minimal, the hole diameter is smaller, and the hole is plugged completely after completion of the hole following the State hole plugging requirements. Most significant, perhaps, is the incorrectly installed or improperly located and/or maintained septic systems, which have been shown to impact creek water quality and even contaminate water wells (for example, Perry Rahn's 2011 article "Sickness caused by septic disposal systems in the Black Hills" in the Proceedings of the South Dakota Academy of Science, Vol. 90 and RESPEC's 2014 watershed final project report to Pennington County, "Spring Creek Watershed Management and Project Implementation Plan Segment I" Topical Report RSI-2415).

For these reasons, I oppose the proposed Pactola Mineral Withdrawal.