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Comments: I'm unsure why my comment isn't appearing in the comment room, as I think it's extremely relevant. Hopefully there is just an error and this one will appear.

After reading through the brief EA, I recommend not to approve Solitario's PO. I ask for a full EIS based on the following insufficiencies in the EA.

General observations:

I believe the EA as it stands violates the

- * Clean Water Act (CWA) (33 USC 1251 et seq.) - insufficient protections in place (i.e., a plan to make a plan)
- * Endangered Species Act (ESA) (16 USC 1531 et seq.) - No mention of endangered species protection
- * EO 13175, Consultation and Coordination with Indian Tribal Governments - Based on the comment from one tribal representative, clearly more outreach much be done to inform additional stakeholders
- * Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 (16 USC 703 et seq.) - No mention of migrating birds
- * National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, as amended (16 USC 470 et seq.) - there are both historic sites and historic homesteads on the claim site
- * Protection of Historic Properties (36 CFR 800)
- * Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act of 1940, as amended - No mention of bald and golden eagle protection

Specific identified issues within the EA are as follows:

*2.2.2.1 Water use and storage:

According to the EA, damage will be minimal at drill sites, and yet they plan to stockpile 10s of thousands of gallons of water. This needs to be further examined.

*2.2.2.1 Tinton road and FS roads:

According to the EA, there will be 2 water trucks daily hauling 5,000 gallons of water. Cyclists currently use Tinton road as well as FS roads. These trucks are extremely dangerous and pose a significant safety hazard to cyclists, drivers, and hikers.

Further, these trucks as well as employee trucks and equipment hauling will increase the pollution in the area, which already has been seriously impacted by dust from Tinton road. Further research into the impacts of the dust on human health, local real estate, and the ecosystem must be conducted.

Traffic has increased steadily on Tinton road and is already unsustainable. There is no room for increased traffic. It is not specified how Solitario would actually improve Tinton Road (an action which should trigger a second EIS) and it is not an acceptable solution.

*2.2.2.2 Equipment and damage:

The EA indicates that more drills will be used during rainy periods. That means even more damage to local roads, trails, and the forest. The forest service has not been able to keep loggers from leaving ruts deeper than 6 inches. How will the forest service ensure that Solitario follows these guidelines? Further, who will be responsible for fixing Tinton road when rigs get stuck or increase damage to the already damaged roads? Who determines what constitutes damage? I do not believe that the FS has the resources available (nor should it have the burden of) keeping an active drilling team accountable.

*2.2.2.3 Workforce

The workforce will operate in 24/7 shifts. The workforce may pose as a danger to those recreating in the national forest, especially at night. There could be potentially up to 48 personnel at up to the three drill sites, meaning 144 workers at a time, all driving Tinton road. People camp, hike, and bike at all hours. These workers will be driving

back and forth and pose a danger to recreators. Further, the EA does not indicate who they will hire. Background checks should be mandatory for all Solitario employees as they will be near recreators, including children and the local high school mountain bike club.

*2.2.3.1 Safety

The EA indicates that Solitario plans to use lights during nighttime drilling. We do not fully understand how that will impact local wildlife including but not limited to big game, bald eagles, nesting owls, bats, and other nocturnal animals.

*2.2.3.2 Water management

The EA states that no water monitor wells are located in the Project vicinity; therefore, no groundwater monitoring is planned. This appears short-sided, considering the close vicinity of homes in the area that have wells. The EA essentially states that Solitario will find 0% of contaminants they do not look for.

Solitario has also proposed that because there are no perennial streams or other waterbodies present at or near any of the drill sites, no surface water sampling is planned. As someone who recreates in this area frequently, I can assure you that the area is filled with springs that can become contaminated, specifically the one that runs down from Big Hill. This area is of specific and very serious concern. Recreators, pets, and cattle commonly use this as a source of water. Again, this stream is a very common source of water for recreators and I have personally used it.

2.2.3.4 waste management

The EA does not indicate what provider will manage disposal of human waste, so we cannot be confident that human waste will be correctly managed.

If core samples are to be re-buried, they must be tested by an independent group to ensure that they are safe from heavy metals and other contaminants. The EA does not provide for this.

2.2.3.5 hazardous materials

This section is insufficient because there is no clear plan in place to handle hazardous materials or the mishandling of those materials. Considering the proximity to recreators, this could pose a major health threat to people and animals alike.

2.2.4 Drill hole plugging

The EA states that it's unlikely that they will hit artesian wells. We need independent consultants to weigh in on this issue as it impacts groundwater for surrounding homes and Spearfish. Further, plugging artesian wells with concrete sounds like a temporary fix to a major potential problem down the road. Again, more research is needed.

2.2.5 Reclamation

"Drillholes would be plugged immediately upon completion; however, the drill pad reclamation itself would not be completed until after the assay results on the core are back, which can take approximately 3 to 4 months." Who will oversee reclamation? If the drill pad is still present for 4 months, how will that impact recreation in the area? It appears that we may lose access to areas for entire summers, and potentially years.

Reseeding: Table 2-2. Reclamation Seed Mix

Species

Annual rye (*Lolium multiflorum*) 10

Slender wheatgrass (*Elymus trachycaulus*) 25

Prairie junegrass (*Koeleria macrantha*) 5
Western wheatgrass (*Pascopyrum smithii*) 30
Canada wildrye (*Elymus canadensis*) 30

This seed mix doesn't reflect our local ecology. We need expert opinions to offer a better mix. These are not acceptable substitutions for important species like pasque flower and other protected native species, some of which take decades to re-establish.

Further, there is no mitigation plan for invasive species caused by disturbed soil (which they plan to disturb to increase seed germination). Species of concern include bull thistle and mullein, but is not limited to these.

3.1.3 Cumulative Effects Considerations

"Because of the temporary nature of the Project and minimal disturbance area, the Project is not likely to interact with other present and foreseeable future projects to contribute to cumulative effects on the following resources: cultural, soils and geology, groundwater, wildlife and fisheries, public health and safety, or socioeconomics. A potential exists for minor cumulative effects on transportation, recreation resources, soils, and vegetation."

This is a gross misstatement and needs further inquiry. The drill sites are very close to many cultural sites (I know because we had to reroute many bike trails for this very reason). I believe home owners in the area might refute proximity to their homes and wells, too. Further, more research is needed to understand how it will impact soils and geology. While drilling may or may not impact groundwater, mining will, and the area drains into Spearfish Creek.

Further, considering that the drill sites are nearly directly on trail locations, the idea that they won't impact recreation is patently untrue. To understand the scope of how this impacts recreation, every volunteer organization that operates in the area must be consulted and their concerns must be considered.

Without fully understanding how drilling and mining could impact the watershed, this project should not be approved.

3.1.3.2 Grazing Allotments

There is no plan in the EA to address safety of livestock and ranchers. Cattle and heavy equipment do not mix well and this poses a serious threat to current grazing areas.

3.1.3.4 Recreational Usage and Events

Solitario has not reached out to the Grooming Alliance of Spearfish, Black Hills Trails, Ridge Riders, or any other group responsible for taking care of our local trail systems. Huge sections of our trails will be impacted. They will be closed to 4 months at a time. Further, these trails take knowledge and skill to reclaim and cannot simply be "put back." Volunteers already have their hands full repairing the damage left by timber sales. Not one single timber sale has ever put a trail back to the way it was or even reached out to local trail representatives to learn about proper trail reclamation. The EA grossly misrepresents impact to recreators and our public trails.

3.1.3.7 Other Miscellaneous Events

There is no adequate response plan to weather and other disasters, including fire, tornados, heavy rain, and snow. As we all know, these things happen here in SD.

It is my hope that the forest service does not approve Solitario's plan of operations as submitted and request a full EIS. I encourage the FS to review the Pactola Reservoir-Rapid Creek Watershed Withdrawal #NP-3479 and consider increasing the reach to include the Spearfish watershed and all of the Black Hills.