

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 6/9/2023 4:22:52 AM

First name: David Jonathan

Last name: Huft

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I have lived and worked in Spearfish for twelve years since graduating from SDSM&T .

Over these years, I have spent countless hours in nature, enjoying the unmatched beauty of the same areas that are now being proposed for exploratory drilling. The land in question is some of the finest in the Black Hills. In my opinion, it is the most beautiful land in the entire state by a considerable margin. To mine there would be would be a serious and irreversible mistake.

I enjoy this area every season of the year. In the winter, it's where I go Nordic skiing and snowshoeing almost every weekend. Whenever there isn't snow, I hike, both on and off trail. Each season is special: listening to the frogs croaking on a cool spring evening, drinking from one of the crystal clear springs on a hot summer day, enjoying the leaves changing color in the fall, or listening to the silence on a moonlit winter night.

The biodiversity of the area is incredible. It is home to plant and animal species that are rare or nonexistent in other parts of the Black Hills. Over the years, I have learned much about botany by identifying various plants that I encounter while hiking. I have also personally found at least two dozen species of mushrooms and other fungi in the area. (Several of these mushrooms are quite tasty, although naturally I can't discuss where exactly they might be found.) I can say with certainty that most of this wildlife is already extremely sensitive to the limited forestry work that is done, and additional disturbances would be detrimental.

Several of the planned drill sites are in areas that I visit on a regular basis. I should be clear that much of the hiking and foraging I do is not limited to popular spots such as the Big Hill trail system. I (and several others I know) make full use of these public lands, not simply sticking to high-traffic areas, but exploring widely.

One of the main reasons why I live in Spearfish is that it is so close to unspoiled nature. Being able to hike and do winter sports in such a beautiful spot enriches my life greatly. Much of my time spent with friends involves visiting this area. To damage or degrade it would also unquestionably hurt the culture of our town and county.

As each year goes by, and as I spend more time in the hills above Spearfish, it becomes increasingly clear that this area is unique and irreplaceable. To spoil this land would be an injustice to us and future generations.

I sincerely hope that the possibility of mining galvanizes the citizens of Lawrence County and beyond to use all available political and legal measures to try to establish the long-term protection and conservation of this unique, sensitive, and extremely beautiful area, rather than exploiting it for the financial gain of some.

Sincerely,

D. Jonathan Huft