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Comments: I am opposed to the proposed withdrawal of 20,574 acres in the Black Hills National Forest. Currently, more than 400 million acres of the 650 million acres managed by the federal government are already off limits or severely restricted to mineral exploration and development. Taking more lands off the table will make it even harder to discover the next deposit.

The United States is already dangerously dependent on foreign sources of minerals like copper, lithium, zinc, cobalt, nickel, rare earth elements and many others. President Biden issued Executive Order 14017 to make American supply chains resilient, rebuild domestic manufacturing, and establish domestic production of critical, strategic, and rare earth element minerals. Eliminating the opportunity to develop these much-needed minerals by withdrawing another 20,574 acres from mineral development would be a move in the wrong direction and make it more difficult to break our reliance on China and other foreign countries. Mineral withdrawals like the one proposed by the Forest Service here place these minerals, which are vital to diverse technologies like computer chips, wind turbines, jet engines, cell phones, electric vehicles and countless others, off limits. Our dependence on imported minerals will grow, potentially threatening our economy and our national security.

Moreover, the withdrawal is unnecessary and implies that federal and state environmental protection agencies do not know how to do their jobs. Laws and regulations in place, such as the Clean Water Act, Clean Air Act, Safe Drinking Water Act, and dozens of other laws and regulations govern how mines must be designed, and how they must operate in order to keep their permits. These laws are more than adequate to protect the environment and--between the US Environmental Protection Agency and South Dakota regulatory agencies--these laws will be robustly enforced. With these environmental protections already in place, mineral exploration and development can proceed safely in South Dakota.

Do not approve the proposed Black Hills National Forest withdrawal.