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Black Hills National Forest
Forest Supervisor's Office
1019 N. 5th Street
Custer, South Dakota 57730

Subject: Protect the Rapid Creek watershed and the Black Hills from mining -- Pactola Reservoir-Rapid Creek Watershed Withdrawal #NP-3479

To Black Hills National Forest Service Supervisor Bryan Karchut and Acting BLM Montana/Dakotas State Director Kimberly O. Prill:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed mineral withdrawal for the Pactola Reservoir-Rapid Creek Watershed in South Dakota. I support the proposal to protect 20,574 acres of National Forest lands in the Black Hills from mineral entry for the next 20 years to protect the cultural and natural resources of the Pactola Reservoir-Rapid Creek Watershed, including municipal water for Rapid City and Ellsworth Air Force Base.

Although this is a good first step, I believe that the withdrawal needs to be larger. The areas to be protected encompass only lands in close proximity to Pactola Reservoir, many of them already protected by the Forest Service for recreational activities. The proposed 20,000 acres identified do not include most of the watershed and the hundreds of mining claims above and below Pactola. This approach ignores where the water in Pactola comes from, and where it goes after leaving the Reservoir. It also ignores the fact that mining downstream from Pactola is as much a threat as mining upstream or adjacent to Pactola because of the interplay between surface and groundwater in the watershed.

Protecting the entire Rapid Creek Watershed is the effective way to protect cultural and natural resources and municipal water supplies for Rapid City and Ellsworth Air Force Base. Only protecting one reservoir from the potential pollution from gold exploration does not protect the water that flows into Pactola Reservoir, or the water that flows out as the sole drinking water source for surrounding communities. Whether communities in the Rapid Creek Watershed use private wells, municipal water systems, local water associations, or piped sources to the Ellsworth Air Force Base, they are not protected if only Pactola Reservoir is the site of mineral withdrawal because the surface water, reservoirs, and aquifers are all connected.

Thank you for your consideration of my comments. Please do NOT add my name to your mailing list. I will learn about future developments on this issue from other sources.

Sincerely,
Christopher Lish
San Rafael, CA