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First name: Edward

Last name: Martley

Organization:

Title:

Comments: To Brian Karchut, BHNH Supervisor:

Let me tell you a story, as well as tell you why I support the mineral withdrawal proposed at Pactola Reservoir. It's not enough, for sure, but it's a good start, and I hope folks pitch in with their comments.

I go back a long time with Pactola. During my high school years, I camped among the machinery in that bowl while the dam was under construction. I watched when the dam was completed and began to fill in 1956 and '57. I learned trout bite in winter, too, and that Jenny Gulch on Pactola was the place. The first time I ice fished in Jenny Gulch was with Al Scovel of Rapid City. I was driving, busting through heavy snow as we fought our way along the trail to the lake. We were getting stuck constantly; it seemed like we (mostly Al) carried that enormous Buick most of the way. Then, gasping, we hacked holes through a couple of feet of ice with a spud bar. We caught a modest number of fish and that was enough. After the battle to get to the lake, we scarcely had strength to pull them from the holes. A lot more fun to talk about than it was to do.

Over the decades that followed, I haunted Pactola and area around it, especially Deerfield Lake and Reynolds Prairie. Castle Creek is the primary contributor of water to Deerfield. It flows in one end of Deerfield, comes out the other, joins with Rapid Creek near Silver City, and together they fill Pactola.

Although I have seen Pactola Lake countless times, fished, canoed and taught my children and grandchildren how to kayak there, I never visited the face of the dam (the dry side). That fortification is 246 feet high - nearly twice the height of the tallest building in downtown Rapid City. It is 2,236 feet long. There is a 200-foot wall of water hanging over my head. If the dam let go, the unleashed torrent would wipe out everything between here and Oblivion. A foolish fear.

Let me tell you what I really worry about. The Black Hills historically is gold country, and there are efforts under way (with gold in the \$2,000 per ounce price range) to make it gold country again. Right now, companies are actively drilling test holes, searching for gold in the Rapid Creek watershed. The watershed is a big area that includes both Deerfield and Pactola reservoirs and Rapid Creek and Castle Creek. It also includes 2,000-acre Pe' Sla, the recently re-acquired sacred ground of the Lakota.

In spite of "new technology" always touted by mining companies, gold extraction can be a nasty business that pollutes and poisons water anywhere near it. Rapid Creek supplies the water for Rapid City and Ellsworth Air Force Base and points on downstream to its rendezvous with the Cheyenne River. If that water is polluted, the cost to the city will be astronomical.

At present, the Black Hills and especially the Rapid Creek watershed provide some of the best and most varied outdoor recreation activities in the nation. RV'ing, boating, fishing, horseback riding, hunting, shooting, trapping, motorcycling, ATV riding, climbing, hiking, tent camping, snowmobiling and snowshoeing, and bicycling - according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis - added \$1.4 billion to the state's gross domestic product. Local residents are becoming aware of the gold threat to their way of life and are organizing to fight back. But success won't come easily. Continuing development, expanding population of people who have no idea of the history of the Hills or the 1972 Flood, or the looming shortage of water in the coming decade, or the lack of capacity for Rapid City's water treatment processes to deal with chemical pollutants are all threats to the watershed.

"Our reservoir is named after Pactolus, an ancient river god in what now is modern Turkey. His streams were flecked with gold from the time King Midas washed away the curse of the golden touch in Pactolus's waters. Today's name, Pactola, seemed appropriate, considering the gold activity in that area of the Black Hills before the dam was constructed. Now, our best hope is that gold will not be discovered before current strategies to stop exploration and mining have a chance to succeed. Let's not have Pactolus waking up."

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