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Organization:

Title:

Comments: Mr. Karchut,

I am writing to express my concerns and opposition to the proposed Pactola Reservoir-Rapid Creek Watershed Mineral Withdrawal. As a South Dakota resident, board member of the South Dakota Mineral Industries Association and advocate for environmental stewardship, I, too, believe it is essential to address the issues affecting water quality in the Rapid Creek watershed, although I do not believe the passage of the proposed mineral withdrawal is the answer.

First, I think it is fair to assume that we all share a concern regarding water quality, not just within the Rapid Creek watershed, but also throughout the entire region. However, it is crucial to note that the proposed mineral withdrawal solely targets an exploration project, failing to address the root causes of many water quality issues. To ensure a comprehensive approach, it would be imperative to conduct a full Environmental Impact Study to assess the impact of recreational activities occurring at Pactola and along Rapid Creek, as well as other factors such as septic tanks, stormwater runoff, leaking underground fuel storage tanks, and landfill management.

Furthermore, it is my belief that the proposed mineral withdrawal represents a government overreach and is unnecessary considering the existing state and federal laws that already provide oversight of exploration and mining activities. These regulations, 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. They are more than adequate to protect the environment, the water and cultural resources, while allowing mineral exploration and development to proceed in South Dakota. These laws already boast the most stringent exploration and mining regulations globally, and additional measures are redundant. It is essential to avoid unnecessarily impeding responsible mineral exploration and extraction.

This mineral withdrawal is part of a series of similar actions taking place around our country, which is drastically reducing the United States' ability to be mineral resource independent and forcing our continued reliance on countries who may not have the best of intentions towards our country and who can cut off our supply chain at any time. Furthermore, these mineral withdrawals are also pushing mining activities to regions of the world where human rights and environmental standards may be significantly lower, not enforced, or non-existent. This means that products that we are using are more than likely coming from countries that have little to no regard for human life or the environment.

The United States prides itself on having the most stringent exploration and mining regulations worldwide, and we must strive to maintain and promote these high standards. Exploration and mining activities should take place in a country that can properly steward our environment as well as ensuring the health and safety of not only the employees but also of all area stakeholders.

The proposed mineral withdrawal area and the rest of Pennington County's land possesses valuable mineral resources that play a key role in our regional and national supply chains, and the proposed withdrawal would have a significant impact on current mineral claims as well as eliminating future exploration opportunities for other minerals that are vital to our region and nation's supply chain, including those crucial for national security, energy security, infrastructure needs, technological innovation, and the transition to green energy. I also point out that while the intent of this withdrawal is based on one gold exploration project, if this withdrawal includes materials like limestone and construction materials, it will exclude the possibility of temporary aggregate mining when developing or improving roads in that region which leads to higher transportation costs of construction materials. It is important to acknowledge the long-term consequences of such restrictions and their potential to

hinder the growth and sustainability of our region and the country.

In light of the aforementioned concerns, I oppose the Pactola Reservoir-Rapid Creek Watershed Mineral Withdrawal. By allowing responsible exploration and development activities on federal lands, we can safeguard the interests of our communities, protect our valuable mineral resources, and maintain the United States' position as a leader in responsible exploration and mining practices.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I trust that you will consider the viewpoints expressed in this letter.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Sailer