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Comments: I am a South Dakotan by birth and by residence, and I am opposed to the proposed mineral withdrawal. As a low temperature aqueous geochemist, I have been shocked at the amount of disinformation regarding the potential effects of mineral exploration on the Rapid Creek watershed. It is highly unlikely that mineral exploration will have any impact on the quality or quantity of water available for municipalities in the Black Hills. In fact, it is more probable that surface activity, such as boating, transportation, construction, agriculture, and residential and commercial landscaping, will have detrimental effects on water quality and availability, yet mineral exploration is the primary activity which is being targeted by activists. If specific mining activity is proposed in the future, such proposals would be subject to a rigorous review and public comment process before any mining is undertaken.

Mineral exploration has the potential to provide high-paying jobs to our Black Hills communities. I have seen lifelong South Dakotans forced out of the area, forced to sell land that has been in their families for generations to real estate barons that subdivide the beautiful Black Hills into small "country estates". The mineral industries have historically provided good paying jobs with great benefits that allow South Dakotans to stay in the area if they wish. Most tourism-related jobs are seasonal and low-paying, unfortunately.

In addition to great jobs, mineral exploration has the potential to provide something even more valuable - knowledge about the geology of our area. The geology of the Black Hills is unique in that in the center of the Hills is exposed a unique set of rocks more than 1.7 billion years old that contain important clues about the construction of Earth's continents. Mineral exploration data has been fundamental in developing our understanding of Earth's history, and exploration in this area of the Black Hills will yield important data sets that will help scientists to understand Earth's history and to predict future geologic hazards in the Upper Midwest.

A 20-year mineral withdrawal ties up the land through two decades of unforeseeable economic, technological, and geopolitical changes. This seems completely unreasonable and short-sighted when each proposed project within the area must already be reviewed on its own merits for environmental impacts.

Please do not approve the proposed mineral withdrawal.