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Title:

Comments: I'm glad to be able to comment. I have a Master's Degree in vegetation ecology, and grew up visiting these unique spruce forests in the Black Hills along with my father, Prof. Dilwyn Rogers, who was a forest ecologist. I strongly object to this plan to cut down the spruce, for the following reasons:

The little enclaves of white spruce in the Black Hills are an ancient, rare and precious forest type that is left over from the Ice Age. You will not find forests like this anywhere else on the Northern Plains. When you visit one of these sites, you are not only stepping into the refreshing shade and lush understory, you are also stepping back in time by thousands of years. It's a miracle that these places are still left here on earth. These spruce forests also provide habitat for other plants and animals that would not survive anywhere else in the Black Hills or on the Northern Plains. Think about the rare orchids or the flying squirrels you may have seen. I still remember these special occasions from my childhood. These would be lost, too.

The spruce forests in the Black Hills also provide unique opportunities for people: hiking, cross-country skiing, camping, bird-watching, and the profound pleasure of simply being in nature - which for many people can be a religious experience. On a hot sunny day or a cold snowy day, a spruce forest is the place most of us would seek out, if we had the choice. The spruce forests also protect our water resources by capturing rain and snow, letting it sink into the ground and then releasing it slowly all year. We in the Black Hills are incredibly lucky to have these spruce enclaves available to us; so close that we can spend the day there and be home in time for supper!

I am not against logging. I have friends who are loggers. But logging must be sustainable in order to support families in the Black Hills over the long haul. There is no way that cutting spruce here could be sustainable. You cut it once, and then it's gone. So why is this proposal on the table? Is it because the pines are being cut too fast, and we are running out of saw timber? Or is it because the spruce themselves are not viable as saw-timber, so we want to convert the forest to new-growth pine? Either way, cutting the spruce does not solve the problem for the timber industry.

If there's a problem in the timber industry of the Black Hills, let's solve that problem directly by implementing a management plan that is sustainable. Cutting the spruce isn't even a short-term fix. How would it help to trade an ancient forest, one that protects streams and groundwater, for a couple years of wood chips? It's like bull-doing an ancient cathedral to slap up a few tar-paper shacks.

Thank you for taking the time to listen to my thoughts.