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Title:

Comments: Comment Regarding: Draft Environmental Assessment for Pactola Reservoir-Rapid Creek Watershed Withdrawal #63876

Dear Ms. Retzlaff and the USDA Forest Service Team,

Greetings! As someone who has enjoyed swimming, fishing, boating, and hiking at Pactola Reservoir and along Rapid Creek since I was born, I am writing to strongly support the proposed withdrawal to protect this incredible watershed. Having grown up exploring and loving these waters, I can personally attest to how vital they are for recreation, community, and the local environment.

Beyond the personal, Rapid Creek is a crucial water source for Rapid City and the surrounding areas, providing clean, safe drinking water. Studies from the U.S. Geological Survey emphasize that protecting watershed areas like this is essential for maintaining water quality (USGS, 2022). This is no small matter—once a watershed is compromised, especially by industrial activity like mining, the damage can be long-lasting and expensive to repair.

Protecting the watershed also safeguards the rich ecosystems that call the creek and reservoir home. The Environmental Protection Agency has highlighted how industrial pollutants, including arsenic and mercury, can devastate aquatic life (EPA, 2021). I would hate to see future generations miss out on the joys of casting a line into a clear lake, knowing that the fish are healthy and thriving.

And let's not forget the economic impact. Pactola Reservoir draws visitors year-round for its clean water, beautiful views, and outdoor activities. From my personal experience enjoying everything this area has to offer, it's easy to see why people keep coming back. The area supports tourism, boosts local businesses, and keeps the economy vibrant. Compromising the water quality through mining or other harmful activities would likely reduce the number of visitors, not to mention the enormous costs associated with cleaning up contaminated water. Protecting the watershed today is the smarter, cheaper, and better option for both the environment and the economy in the long run.

The Pactola Reservoir-Rapid Creek Watershed is more than just a pretty spot on the map—it's part of the community's lifeblood. Preserving it means preserving clean water, healthy ecosystems, and the ability for future generations to enjoy the same activities that have been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. I urge you to approve the withdrawal and ensure that this special place remains protected for years to come.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Aaron Ellison