

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 10/14/2024 7:25:06 PM

First name: Paige

Last name: Gibbons

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Dear U.S. Forest Service,

I am writing to express my strong support for the proposed 'Mineral Withdrawal' surrounding the Pactola Reservoir near Rapid City, SD.

The Pactola Reservoir is the primary source of drinking water for Rapid City, Ellsworth Air Force Base, and thousands of people downstream. The preservation of this essential water source is paramount, as the continued threat of mining and drilling in this area poses significant risks to the community's health and the environment. Allowing mineral extraction near the reservoir could lead to contamination of our water supply, endangering the well-being of the people who rely on it daily.

Currently, a staggering 293,000 acres of land in the Black Hills are under some phase of a mining claim, and this has expanded significantly since 2022. With mining companies already occupying nearly 20% of the region, it is crucial that the remaining unspoiled areas, especially those with such a vital function as the Pactola Reservoir, are protected.

In addition to safeguarding water quality, this mineral withdrawal is an important step in recognizing and honoring the historical significance of the Black Hills. As stated in *United States vs. Sioux Nation of Indians* (1980), the land is part of the illegally occupied Ogeton Treaty Territory. Preserving this land for future generations, while recognizing the rightful stewardship of Indigenous Peoples, is long overdue. The mineral withdrawal serves as a step in the right direction.

I urge the U.S. Forest Service to approve the mineral withdrawal and ensure that this land remains protected for the next 20 years. Our health, environment, and commitment to respecting Indigenous lands depend on this decision.

Thank you for considering my comments and for your continued work in protecting our nation's public lands.