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Organization:

Title:

Comments: To the US Forest Service:

I urge the Forest Service to consider an expansion/additional withdrawal:

As a landowner with property adjacent to Rapid Creek, a retired adjunct professor of biology, and an avid rock climber and outdoorsman, I am writing in strong support of the USDA Forest Service's application to withdraw the mentioned National Forest System lands from settlement, sale, location, entry, and leasing under any public land, mining, mineral, and geothermal leasing laws.

I support the proposed 20,574-acre mineral withdrawal around Pactola Reservoir and along Upper Rapid Creek - the water supply for Rapid City and Ellsworth Air Force Base. I support the goal of permanently protecting the natural and cultural resources in the entire Pactola watershed.

In my first job out of college was as a research technician at the South Dakota School of Mines (SDSMT) in 1980-1981 in its biology department. A research grant from the US Forest Service extension service was supporting research into measuring the presence of cyanide compounds in plants adjacent to abandoned gold mining tailings. The data showed how abandoned tailings, which contained leachates from the gold extraction process, resulted in local vegetation up-taking and storing the cyanide as cyanogenic compounds. From this work I realized the potential long term impacts of resource mining on the natural environment can be multi-directional, and negative in its impacts.

It is critically important to protect all the upstream tributaries that supply water to the Pactola Reservoir (and thereby the natural resources in those areas), in order to protect the aquifers that Rapid Creek feeds and and surface waters that flow downstream from Pactola. This will also serve to protect downstream native plants and wildlife.

The importance of water quality in Rapid Creek, and its dependent wildlife habitat cannot be underestimated. This watershed has the cleanest flowing waters and likely the highest biodiversity of species of plants and animals in the Rapid City area. This special resource must be protected, and withdrawing the Rapid Creek/ Pactola watershed from future mining development and impacts from mining activities or investigations is of paramount importance.

Ideally, the protection of the entire Rapid Creek Watershed is the best way to protect surface and groundwaters that flow past my home, and support the home of all of Rapid City's residents and businesses, the Ellsworth Air Force Base, and so many other surrounding communities.

My professional background and personal experiences have provided me with a deeper understanding of the delicate balances in our local ecosystem, and the importance of preserving the natural resources in our area. Riparian areas are critical habitat for the vast majority of wildlife species due to the vegetative cover and food and water resources critical to the reproduction of these wildlife populations.

In the Rapid Creek area, I have observed a healthy upland forest with high plant biodiversity, adjacent to wetland and riparian vegetation forming a very high quality wildlife habitat. Wetlands are the nurseries of the majority of wildlife species. I have observed a great many species of birds including active families of waterfowls who are obviously nesting and feeding in the area. Access to clean water, and the dense vegetation create both safe habitat and provide the food sources necessary to successfully support the wildlife populations that are a pride of

this region.

A variety of species of amphibians, snakes, small fur bearing mammals, ungulates, and predators are all found in the Rapid Creek watershed. I have seen them over the decades. This is a prime habitat and should be protected for future generations. It exemplifies the best of habitat areas in South Dakota, and would be a crime to see it destroyed by excessive water withdrawals or pollution of the waterways such that this habitat is severely degraded or lost.

Based on my knowledge and observations, I believe that allowing mining activities in the Rapid Creek Watershed area would have several detrimental consequences:

- 1) Water contamination: Mining can introduce hazardous chemicals, such as cyanide and heavy metals, into the lake and creek, posing risks to human health and the environment.
- 2) Soil erosion and sedimentation: Mining operations can cause soil erosion and sedimentation, which negatively impact water quality, aquatic habitats, and the stability of the creek banks.
- 3) Habitat destruction and fragmentation: Mining can result in the loss of habitats for many plant and animal species, leading to a decline in biodiversity and local extinction of sensitive species.
- 4) Noise and air pollution: Mining operations generate noise and dust, which can negatively impact the quality of life for residents living along the creek and cause potential health issues.
- 5) Social and economic impacts: While mining may bring short-term economic benefits, these are often offset by potential negative impacts on the environment, public health, and quality of life.

As someone who has experienced the beauty of our region through rock climbing, hiking, biking, birding and wildlife viewing, and as a biologist and professor, I recognize the value of preserving the natural landscape for both ecological and recreational purposes. The Rapid Creek Watershed area is an invaluable resource that supports a diverse array of plant and animal species, and offers countless recreational opportunities for locals and visitors alike.

In light of these considerations, I urge the responsible officials to approve the withdrawal application and protect our land and water resources for the benefit of current and future generations.

Sincerely,

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