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First name: Carla Rae

Last name: Marshall

Organization:

Title:

Comments: Project: Pactola Reservoir - Rapid Creek Watershed Withdrawal #63876

Dear USFS,

I say YES to the Pactola Reservoir-Rapid Creek Watershed Withdrawal in our Sacred HeSapa (Black Hills), which is part of our Treaty Territory under the 1868 Ft. Laramie Treaty.

I wholeheartedly support this Withdrawal proposal to have ... "20,574 acres of NFS lands be withdrawn (closed) to all forms of entry, appropriation, and disposal under the mining laws, mineral and geothermal leasing laws, and public land laws, subject to valid existing rights."

I agree with Alternative A in the EA, and I agree giving this project a FONSI. I also highly encourage the FS to expedite Alternative A and the FONSI to the Secretary of the Department of Interior - time is of the essence.

I say YES to this Withdrawal because the HeSapa are very sacred for us Lakota as they tell hold our creation story - our coming into beings as human beings. HeSapa hold our traditional teachings, holds spaces for our spiritual ceremonies, and provides our natural foods and plant medicines. This land is our "Church" and where we put our prayer altars -- it is known to us as "The Heart of Everything That Is." I believe the HeSapa holds eons of memory in our DNA and Water is our main entity - Mni Wicozani; Water is Life. Water is Alive. Water is Sacred. Says so in the Christian Bible, too.

I say YES, because I live here and enjoy drinking water out of my tap. I also harvest plants and medicines within the Withdrawal area. And I enjoy the beautiful scenery of the area.

I say YES, because it is rewarding to know it will protect the BigHorn Sheep birthing range in the area, along with the thousands of other wildlife and plant species who make the area their home and depend on clean natural flowing water. We humans must be their voice and advocate for their safety. This 20,574 acres can provide a small sanctuary for wildlife for 20 years.

It is a know fact that the Black Hills has unique and special ecosystems that are interconnected. Indigenous ecological knowledge recognizes that our natural world has life; the Water, the Earth, the four-legged, winged, aquatics and insect, and the plant nations.

In your own words: "The health of our nation depends, in many ways, on the vitality of our nation's forests and grasslands. These natural resources contribute a variety of essential elements to our well-being, including clean air, water and soil." ~ USDA Forest Service

Although I am in total support of this Withdrawal proposal we all know that what happens upstream affects us downstream. Here in the Black Hills water goes in all different directions. So it is concerning to me that the entire 198,000 acres of the Rapid Creek Watershed is not included since there are existing mining claims both upstream and downstream of the boundaries of the project area. Those mining companies who "own" mineral claims outside of the Withdrawal boundaries will be governed under the mining law 1872 and therefore we could see a significant impact around the area over the next 20 years. Which would undo what is set out to accomplish and that is to protect the Withdrawal acreage and waterways from mining. Water flows where it wants to. Water has no boundaries.

I know that there have been several "accidents" of mining waste spills in the Northern Hills, where heavy mining has, and still is, occurring. We must stop allowing any toxic mining waste to infiltrate anywhere close to our reservoirs, creeks, and streams. Of course my dream is to have a TOTAL WITHDRAWAL for the entire HeSapa region to protect our natural waterways. Under the United Nations it is a human rights violation to deny access to clean water for human consumption. Based on past history of mining in the Black Hills, it's not IF a toxic dam or (mining mud holding pond) will break, BUT WHEN.

Let's remember that Extractivism's long history has plagued our precious ecosystems here in the HeSapa; from boom to bust, since General Custer found Gold under the General Mining Law of 1872. This archaic law allows for inadequate insurance or bonds to hold these mining companies accountable for toxic spills when they happen. It's time to CLEAN UP THE MINES FROM THE PAST!

It is time for each and every one of us to show respect to the natural world and that we care enough about our future generations to protect them from those that only care about money and will cause pollutants to infiltrate our clean drinking water. It's time to work together to protect our Grandmother Earth and her life-blood (WATER).

Lastly, if I may quote your agency: "Through Shared Stewardship, the Forest Service is coming together with tribal governments, states, and other partners to address these challenges and explore opportunities to improve forest health and resiliency across management jurisdictions. This collaborative approach to land management builds on a long history of partnerships to manage the nation's forests and grasslands." ~ USDA Forest Service

THANK YOU FOR WORKING HARD TO HAVE THIS 20,574 ACRES PROTECTED FOR THE NEXT 20 YEARS. IT'S A START TO A MEANINGFUL STEWARDSHIP OF OUR SACRED HESAPA.

Respectfully submitted Oct. 27, 2024

Carla Rae Marshall,
Rapid City, SD 57709
Cheyenne River Sioux Tribal Member

My submitted comment is my personal comment and not to be considered as any form of "Tribal Consolation".