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Organization: The Nature Conservancy in SD-ND-MN  
Title: Deputy Chapter Director, Conservation  
Comments: October 28, 2024

Shawn Cochran, Forest Supervisor  
Black Hills National Forest  
1019 N. 5th Street  
Custer, SD 57730

RE: Pactola Reservoir - Rapid Creek Watershed Withdrawal #63876

Supervisor Cochran,

We appreciate the opportunity to offer our support of the Draft Environmental Assessment for the proposed mineral withdrawal in the Rapid Creek watershed. The Nature Conservancy is a global environmental nonprofit organization working to create a world where people and nature can thrive. Since 1961, TNC has worked in South Dakota with private landowners, government agencies, nonprofit partners, and Indigenous communities to protect, manage, and restore habitat.

The Black Hills of South Dakota, including the Black Hills National Forest, are home to an impressive array of plant and animal species that face compounding threats of habitat loss, fire risk, invasive species, and climate change. The proposed mineral withdrawal area surrounding Pactola Reservoir is notable for its connectivity to other intact habitat, recognized biodiversity, and resilience to climate change.\* As affirmed by the Finding of No Significant Impact, the proposed withdrawal would benefit the continued biodiversity and resilience of the Rapid Creek watershed.

The proposed mineral withdrawal helps protect human uses of the watershed as well. Good water quality in the Pactola Reservoir is essential for retaining its use as a source of drinking water for many people in the region. Furthermore, the long history of Indigenous Peoples in the Black Hills continues today in the withdrawal area and surrounding landscape.

Thank you for considering our comments in support of the Draft Environmental Assessment and the proposed mineral withdrawal in the Rapid Creek watershed.

Regards,

Angie Becker Kudelka  
Deputy Chapter Director, Conservation, MN-ND-SD  
The Nature Conservancy

\* The Nature Conservancy's Resilient Land Mapping Tool: <https://www.maps.tnc.org/resilientland/#/explore>