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Comments: As a resident of the Black Hills and a hydrologist, I understand the critical importance of protecting our water resources. Clean water is essential not only for life but also for maintaining ecological functions in our region. However, I believe that mineral exploration and responsible resource extraction are equally vital to both local communities and our national interests. For these reasons, I oppose the proposed mineral withdrawal and support the NO ACTION Alternative of the Draft EA.

Mineral exploration plays a crucial role in advancing technology, boosting economic growth, and supporting critical infrastructure. With the stringent environmental protections provided by the Clean Water Act and state-level regulations, modern mining practices mitigate risks to water systems. Hydrological assessments, baseline studies, and groundwater monitoring ensure that exploration does not compromise water quality, allowing for a balanced approach to resource use and environmental conservation.

The Biden-Harris administration has emphasized the strategic importance of critical minerals to the nation's energy security and economic future. As noted in a recent White House fact sheet, critical minerals are "essential building blocks of the modern economy," with demand expected to rise exponentially as the world transitions toward clean energy. The Black Hills region is home to many of these minerals, including antimony, which plays a crucial role in energy storage, semiconductors, and flame retardants. This proposed withdrawal area contains valuable deposits of antimony, making it critical to domestic supply chains.

The decision to restrict mineral exploration raises important national concerns. Does the withdrawal align with U.S. goals to secure domestic critical mineral supply chains? Additionally, could limiting access to these resources impact energy independence or the transition to green technologies? Restricting exploration would not only hinder efforts to build sustainable technologies but also increase our reliance on foreign sources for critical materials essential to the energy transition.

With global demand for minerals like antimony surging, responsible exploration in the Black Hills is crucial to supporting the clean energy transition while maintaining our water resources. I encourage decision-makers to pursue a balanced approach that promotes environmental protection while unlocking the potential of the region's mineral wealth.

Thank you for considering my perspective.