

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 5/14/2025 12:12:03 AM

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Comments:

I write today to express my strong opposition to the Rochford Mineral Exploratory Drilling Project (#67838) proposed for the Black Hills, South Dakota. This project poses unacceptable risks to both the cultural heritage and environmental integrity of an area held sacred by the Lakota People for generations. The proposed drilling is not only dangerously close to Pe' Sla-a central ceremonial and spiritual site-but may directly impact it. Any incursion into or near Pe' Sla is a direct affront to Indigenous sovereignty and religious freedom.

Pe' Sla is not simply a geographic location; it is a living spiritual landscape. It holds historical, cultural, and ceremonial importance to the Lakota and other Indigenous communities who continue to practice their traditions there today. Allowing mining activities in such close proximity threatens to irreversibly disrupt these sacred practices and erodes the principles of tribal consultation and respect enshrined in federal obligations.

Furthermore, the environmental risks of this project cannot be ignored. According to the Black Hills Clean Water Alliance, the project would involve 18 drill pads, with some situated dangerously close to stream systems in the upper Rapid Creek watershed. The possibility of contaminating surface and underground water sources is real and deeply concerning-not just to local communities, but to the broader regional ecosystem. The long-term costs of water degradation far outweigh the short-term economic gains of mineral exploration.

Given these high stakes, I respectfully request the following:

That the U.S. Forest Service reject the current drilling proposal on the grounds of cultural, spiritual, and environmental harm;

That the agency require a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to adequately assess the consequences of the project, including cumulative impacts on tribal lands, water quality, and biodiversity;

That the Forest Service extend the public comment period by at least 60 days to ensure meaningful participation from all affected communities, especially Indigenous stakeholders.

It is a core American principle to uphold religious freedom and environmental stewardship. Authorizing mineral exploration in an area so vital to Indigenous ceremonial life would represent a failure to honor those principles. I urge the Forest Service to uphold its responsibility to the public and to future generations by protecting Pe' Sla and the surrounding Black Hills.