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Organization:

Title:

Comments: I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed Rochford Mineral Exploratory Drilling Project (Project #67838) by Pete Lien & Sons. This project poses significant threats to the cultural, environmental, and spiritual integrity of the Black Hills region, particularly the sacred site of Pe' Sla.

Cultural and Spiritual Significance:

Pe' Sla, also known as Reynolds Prairie, holds profound spiritual importance for the Lakota people. It is a ceremonial site integral to traditional Lakota creation stories and is used for ceremonies multiple times throughout the year. Drilling activities in close proximity to this sacred site would be akin to desecrating a place of worship, causing irreparable harm to Indigenous cultural practices and beliefs .

Environmental Concerns:

The proposed drilling involves 18 drill pads, each potentially reaching depths of up to 1,000 feet. These activities threaten the upper Rapid Creek watershed, a vital water source for Rapid City, Ellsworth Air Force Base, and surrounding communities. The risk of contamination to surface and underground water sources is substantial, with some proposed drill pads located alarmingly close to streams .

Lack of Comprehensive Environmental Review:

Given the potential impacts on both cultural sites and the environment, it is imperative that a thorough Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) be conducted. The current plan for a categorical exclusion under a Decision Memo is insufficient to address the complexities and sensitivities of this project .

Request for Extended Public Comment Period:

The public comment period, currently extended to May 16, 2025, does not provide adequate time for comprehensive community engagement, especially among Indigenous populations who are directly affected. I urge the Forest Service to extend the scoping period by 60 days to ensure all voices are heard and considered.

Conclusion:

The potential cultural desecration and environmental degradation posed by the Rochford Mineral Exploratory Drilling Project are too significant to ignore. I respectfully request that the Forest Service:

Deny the approval of the Rochford Mineral Exploratory Drilling Project.

Initiate a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to assess the potential impacts thoroughly.

Extend the public comment period by 60 days to facilitate inclusive community participation.

Protecting Pe' Sla and the surrounding environment is a matter of preserving cultural heritage and safeguarding essential natural resources for current and future generations.

Sincerely,

Hans Stephenson