

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 5/16/2025 5:31:46 PM

First name: Russ

Last name: Zephier

Organization:

Title:

Comments: I am writing to express strong opposition to the proposed exploratory graphite drilling project by Pete Lien & Sons near Pe' Sla, a sacred ceremonial site in the Black Hills that holds deep cultural, ecological, and spiritual meaning for the Lakota, Dakota, Nakota and Cheyenne people. This project threatens to inflict cumulative adverse effects on a living sacred site that continues to be used for ceremony, prayers, plant gathering, traditional teachings, and spiritual healing to this day.

The Lakota creation story comes from the Black Hills, from the heart of Mother Earth. We came up from the caves which are connected under our Black Hills, and we received several very sacred places to do ceremony.

Pe' Sla is one of these central ceremonial places. This is where our existence comes from.

Pe' Sla is where Morning Star came down to help the people.

Sundance happens at Pe' Sla. Other ceremonies that our spiritual leaders must perform happen at Pe' Sla.

Pe' Sla is a Traditional Cultural Property (TCP) and a living ceremonial landscape. From spring through fall, Lakota people gather there for prayer, offerings, traditional teachings, and ceremonies.

The proposed project involves:

18 drill pads, each with potential drilling of up to 1,000 feet

Operations running 12 hours a day and possibly 24 hours a day

Vegetation removal, toxic mud pits, and soil disturbance

Industrial noise, lights, traffic, and disruption near a sacred site

The cumulative impacts of these activities include:

Disruption of the sacred quiet necessary for ceremony and prayer. Loss of sacred quiet and disruption of soundscapes essential to prayer and ceremony.

Spiritual disconnection caused by the intrusion of industrial noise, lights, and activity into a site meant for healing, visioning, and guidance.

Interference with ceremonial access and spiritual practices

Destruction of native and medicinal plants, nearly all of which hold traditional and ceremonial value. These are not just biological resources-they are cultural resources, and must be documented and protected as part of the TCP

Encroachment on the spiritual boundary of Pe' Sla by placing the project as close as legally possible to the sacred site

Furthermore, this project violates the United States government's treaty obligations and trust responsibilities to the Lakota people. The Fort Laramie Treaties of 1851 and 1868 affirmed the Lakota's sovereignty and right to the Black Hills. The U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 1980 (United States v. Sioux Nation of Indians) that the Black Hills

were unjustly taken and that this constituted a breach of trust.

It is within this context that I remind the U.S. Forest Service: you are operating on stolen land. The ethical and legal responsibility now is not to further exploit that land, but to be good stewards-to honor treaty rights, uphold the federal trust responsibility, and protect living sacred sites like Pe' Sla from irreparable harm.

I respectfully urge your agency to:

Deny all permits related to this drilling project.

Conduct a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that includes full Tribal consultation and a comprehensive analysis of cumulative adverse effects on cultural use, spiritual health, plant knowledge, and ceremonial practice

Extend the comment period.

Acknowledge and protect the Black Hills and Pe' Sla as a TCP and a sacred landscape, not an industrial zone.

Honor Pe' Sla as a living traditional cultural and spiritual site, and ensure protection of the surrounding area from future encroachment.

Pe' Sla must not be sacrificed to short-term industry. It is a sacred, interconnected landscape that continues to sustain Indigenous ceremonial life today. The cumulative effects of exploratory drilling-physical, spiritual, cultural, and psychological-poses a direct threat to that life and must be prevented.