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Title:

Comments: Subject: Opposition to the Rochford Mineral Exploratory Drilling Project

Dear Forest Service Officials,

I am writing to express my strong opposition to the proposed Rochford Mineral Exploratory Drilling Project in the Black Hills National Forest. This project poses unacceptable environmental, cultural, and community risks that far outweigh any potential economic benefit.

The proposed drilling site lies in close proximity to the upper Rapid Creek watershed, one of the Black Hills' most vital water sources. This watershed not only supports sensitive ecosystems and diverse wildlife, but also supplies clean drinking water to communities downstream, including Rapid City. Disturbance from drilling, even exploratory, increases the risk of sedimentation, pollution, and long-term degradation to the watershed - consequences that would affect thousands of residents and the health of the region for years to come.

The Black Hills are also a sacred and ecologically sensitive area, with irreplaceable cultural heritage sites, including lands sacred to the Lakota people. Drilling operations threaten these natural and cultural assets through potential contamination, habitat disruption, increased noise and traffic, and long-term landscape damage.

While the project is described as "exploratory," it is a clear precursor to industrial-scale mining. The environmental footprint of such activities is significant, and even this early phase introduces real harm. The cumulative impact of exploratory and future mining operations in this area could be irreversible.

I urge you to prioritize the long-term preservation of the Black Hills and the protection of critical water resources like Rapid Creek over short-term industrial interests. The Forest Service has a responsibility to manage public lands for the benefit of all Americans, now and in the future - not for the profit of a few mining companies.

Please reject the Rochford drilling proposal and protect the integrity of the Black Hills National Forest and its watersheds.