

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 5/17/2025 1:44:36 AM

First name: Boyd

Last name: Gourneau

Organization: Lower Brule Sioux Tribe

Title: Chairman

Comments: I write on behalf of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe to object to the so-called Rochford Mineral Exploratory Drilling Project submitted by Pete Lien and Sons, Inc. The Tribe requests government-to-government consultation on the mining proposal, requests protection for the Black Hills and Pe' Sla as our sacred sites, protection for cultural properties, protection for water quality for tribal members who live in the Rapid Creek watershed and rely on it for domestic water, and protection for the land, natural resources, and important wildlife habitat in the area.

We ask the USDA Forest Service to come to our headquarters in Lower Brule, South Dakota to consult with the Tribe and Tribal Council. We ask for the opportunity to conduct a full historic preservation and cultural resources survey on the project to protect our sacred sites, historic significance and cultural properties. We ask the U.S. Forest Service to require an Environmental Impact Statement on the Mining Proposal.

The Black Hills are deeply sacred to the Lakota, Nakota and Dakota peoples. From the beginning, our Lakota were Free People, with our own Dakota Makoche territory. Our Lakota-Nakota-Dakota Oyate gave our lives to protect our homelands. The United States of America entered into the 1868 Treaty affirming our original national territory, including the Black Hills. Having entered the Treaty by mutual consent, Natural Law (as set forth at America's foundation in the Declaration of Independence) and the Constitution's Treaty and Supremacy Clauses prohibit America's unilateral abrogation of our Treaty.

Pe Sla is a sacred site of immense spiritual and cultural significance to the Lakota, Nakota, and Dakota peoples, also known as the Sioux Nation. Located in the Black Hills of South Dakota, Pe' Sla is the Center of the Black Hills, "the Heart of Everything that Is," and is integrally connected to our Lakota creation story and star knowledge.

Impacts on Pe' Sla, Sacred Sites and Cultural Properties:

*Disruption of sacred land: Pe' Sla is considered a vital ceremonial site, and drilling in the area could disturb its spiritual and cultural integrity.

*Water contamination risks: Some drill pads are near streams, raising concerns about contamination of Rapid Creek watershed and underground water sources².

*Environmental degradation: The drilling process involves 18 drill pads, each capable of drilling up to 1,000 feet, which could alter the landscape and ecosystem.

*Pe' Sla is considered a vital ceremonial site, and drilling in the area could disturb its spiritual and cultural integrity.

*Water contamination risks: Some drill pads are near streams, raising concerns about contamination of Rapid Creek watershed and underground water sources².

*Environmental degradation: The drilling process involves 18 drill pads, each capable of drilling up to 1,000 feet, which could alter the landscape and ecosystem.

Experience has shown that mining operations pollute, Black Hills water. The Homestake Gold Mine discharged hazardous substances into Whitewood Creek for about 100 years, from 1877 to 1977. Contaminated sediments from the mine were transported downstream into the Belle Fourche River, Rosesbud, and Missouri River, reaching Oahe Reservoir 200 miles away. The pollution included heavy metals like arsenic, lead, mercury, and cyanide, which continue to leach into surface and groundwater. Mercury is now found in our fish in the Missouri River.

The proposed Graphite exploration and mining will contaminate water in the upper Rapid Creek watershed, with

some proposed drill pads very close to streams, contaminate and cross-contaminate underground water sources, which Rapid City, Ellsworth Air Force Base and nearby communities rely on for drinking water. If contaminated, project opponents say it would impact Rapid City, Rapid Valley, Box Elder and Ellsworth Air Force Base's natural water source. "If the aquifers or either of our two reservoirs in the watershed are contaminated by this project, we're going to see permanent irreparable damage to our way of life. The negative consequences to our communities and our economy are massive," Black Hills residents say.

The Lower Brule Sioux Tribe requests government-to-government consultation on the mining proposal, requests protection for the Black Hills and Pe' Sla as our sacred sites, protection for cultural properties, protection for water quality for thousands of tribal members who live in the Rapid Creek watershed and rely on it for domestic water, and protection for the land, natural resources, and important wildlife habitat in the area.

We ask the USDA Forest Service to come to our headquarters in Lower Brule, South Dakota to consult with the Tribe and Tribal Council. We ask to conduct a full historic preservation and cultural resources survey on the project to protect our sacred sites, historic significance and cultural properties. We ask the U.S. Forest Service to require an Environmental Impact Statement on the Mining Proposal. We call upon the Forest Service to protect our sacred sites, cultural properties, land, water, and natural resources, and especially the life, public health and safety by maintaining the pristine quality of domestic drinking water sources.