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Comments: To the USDA Forest Service,

I am writing to express my opposition to the Pete Lien and Sons Rochford Mineral Exploratory Drilling Project. After reviewing the project documentation, I have several serious concerns, particularly regarding water safety, local ecosystems, and the overall lack of transparency throughout the application.

Several proposed drilling sites in the southern drilling sites are located alarmingly close to water sources. However, the application uses language that downplays this fact. In the Water Quality (Section V. B.) of the Plan of Operation, it states that the sites are not "in streams and wetlands," but further down, in section V.E., Fish and Wildlife, it acknowledges that drilling sites 1-5 and 16 - 20 are located near streams. This inconsistency, along with the vague language throughout all of Water Quality (Section V. B.) minimizes the potential threat and fails to acknowledge how quickly contamination can spread through interconnected water systems.

Additionally, they fail to mention or assess smaller, but still significant, environmental impacts, such as noise pollution and its potential effects on local wildlife. Disruption from drilling activities, vehicle traffic, and equipment operation can stress animal populations and alter migration, feeding, and nesting behavior, particularly in sensitive habitats.

They fail to address the broader ecological consequences of disturbing an estimated 3.24 acres of ground and removing 3.3 acres of trees. Noting, no consideration was given to the impacts on vegetation, wildflowers, or pollinators. Increased vehicle traffic and ground disturbance can crush native plant life and disrupt delicate pollinator networks that are vital to the surrounding ecosystem. These are not minor impacts; vegetation and pollinators are foundational to the region's biodiversity. Ignoring these factors demonstrates a concerning lack of environmental awareness and due diligence in the planning process.

The consequences of an incident at these sites could be severe. Contaminants such as oil or hazardous materials can spread quickly through soil and waterways, rendering water sources undrinkable, damaging ecosystems, and harming wildlife. Yet the company provides no specific information on how these scenarios would be meaningfully addressed. The vague commitment to "take action as needed" and the presence of "absorbent material of sufficient size and absorption capacity" are reactive and superficial, not part of a serious environmental remediation plan. The same applies to their proposed method of monitoring water quality, which relies solely on visual inspection. This is not a credible approach for solely protecting such a vital resource.

What exactly does taking action entail? How will environmental damage be assessed, remediated, and monitored long-term? Language such as "will be removed immediately" fails to address how the environment would be made whole again or that the company would be held accountable for long-term harm.

Understanding and clearly communicating risk is a fundamental part of responsible corporate conduct, especially when proposing mining activity on public lands. The lack of specificity and transparency in this application is not just disappointing, it is deeply concerning. It is not endearing to see a company of this size provide only minimal and evasive answers to questions of such importance.

The ecosystems within the Black Hills are priceless national assets. Damage could be seen and dealt with for many generations. The handling of any project with consequences this severe must be handled with professionalism, accuracy, and thoroughness.

If Pete Lien & Sons genuinely intends to prioritize environmental stewardship, the proposal must include a transparent and detailed plan outlining how they will prevent and remediate environmental harm, particularly to water resources and the local ecosystem. The absence of such a plan undermines public trust and raises valid concerns about long-term environmental impacts.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this matter. I urge the Forest Service to reject this proposal or, at the very least, require a significantly more rigorous and transparent environmental risk management strategy before permitting any exploration activity to proceed.