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First name: Zakari

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Organization:

Title:

Comments: My name is Zakari Howard and I am writing as a concerned individual who deeply values the environmental and cultural integrity of the Black Hills. I am personally invested in the outcome of the proposed Ponderosa Exploratory Gold Drilling Project because it is my duty as an Indigenous woman to uplift Native voices and steward the land. As a Lakota woman, many of the Lakota Oyate have cultural ties to these lands.

I respectfully urge the Forest Service to conduct a full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for this project. An EIS is necessary to thoroughly assess the long-term effects of exploratory drilling on this ecologically and culturally sensitive region.

This project poses several potential threats that should be closely examined and avoided:

- \*Cultural and historical resources sacred to Indigenous peoples
- \*Water quality and availability, especially considering the region's reliance on clean groundwater
- \*Wildlife habitats and ecosystem health
- \*Recreational use that supports local economies
- \*Potential for economic harm from contamination or environmental degradation

Additionally, I ask that the public comment period be extended by 60 days to ensure that all community members have a fair opportunity to review the proposal and respond.

Please consider the long-term impact of this project on our environment, communities, and future generations. I appreciate the opportunity to provide input and urge you to prioritize transparency, environmental integrity, and Indigenous voices in this process.

Sincerely,

Zakari Howard

Cheyenne River Sioux / Kickapoo Tribe of Kansas