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Organization: NDN Collective

Title: Local Organizer

Comments: Respectful Greetings,

We submit this comment to register NDN Collective's strong opposition to Ponderosa Exploration Drilling #64551, a gold mining project proposed by Solitario Resources. Citizens of Spearfish, surrounding sovereign Tribal Nations, as well as the general public, have already successfully opposed another proposal by Solitario (Goldencrest Exploratory Drilling), and our collective position has not changed with this new project, which is even bigger and more destructive.

Through our local work and grantmaking NDN Collective has demonstrated that it is possible and imperative to invest in community development that is sustainable, regenerative, and that meets the needs of all peoples while protecting our most vital and priceless landscapes and ecosystems. Upholding our commitment and our accountability to the surrounding communities, we hosted two informational sessions at local businesses in Spearfish, SD. Attended by Native and non-Native citizens, attendees overwhelmingly opposed the proposed project citing the destruction of the recreational use of the area (hiking, biking, skiing) and the potential for water pollution. Preservation of water quantity and quality is a priority concern for the citizens of Spearfish, as documented in their most recent Comprehensive Plan.

The current proposal by Solitario would license over 400 drill holes, to a depth of 3,000+ feet. Each hole is a potential source point for contamination exponentially increasing the risk of irreversible pollution to the surrounding watershed. This threatens everything from biodiversity to water run-off into Spearfish Creek, including critical recharge areas for both the Minnelusa and Madison Aquifers. Not only does this pose an unacceptable risk to a vital source of drinking water, but the proposed area also represents a significant loss of land for both recreational and ceremonial use as the mining site is less than a mile from ceremonial grounds located on nearby sovereign tribal lands. Ecological devastation would be compounded by the clearcutting of trees and vegetation at 43 drill pads.

The only true beneficiary of this request is Solitario. The proposed project is a threat to Tribal treaty rights, and the ability of Indigenous Peoples' to exercise their religious freedom on their ancestral lands. It causes more harm to South Dakota's tourism economy and world-class outdoor recreation opportunities and it compromises the health, beauty, and biodiversity of our local environment for short term corporate profits.

The people of the Spearfish area have made their opposition to mining projects in their backyard clear, and they continue to do so today (July 21, 2025) with the Common Council of the City of Spearfish unanimously passing Resolution 2025-40, "A Resolution In Opposition To The Ponderosa Exploration Drilling Project By Solitario Resources, Inc. Without Further Study and Conclusions From An Environmental Impact Statement."

As a movement organization and grantmaker, we advance the self-determination of Indigenous Peoples' because we know that this leads to the best outcomes for all Peoples and for Mother Earth. With deep ties in the ?esápa (Black Hills) we are committed to working with local stakeholders, sovereign Tribes, and organizing in the surrounding area. We will continue to stand in solidarity with all those who have come together during this time to protect our peoples, our ecosystems, and the ?esápa from further destructive projects. We understand the importance of sustainably investing in the local economy and we know that approval of this project is not the way to do that.

We call on the Black Hills National Forest Service to deny this project application.