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Comments: I am writing to express concern regarding ongoing commercial timber harvesting and clearcutting practices within the Black Hills region.

The Black Hills represent a unique and irreplaceable ecosystem that has developed over centuries. While forest management is necessary, large-scale removal of mature trees can have significant negative consequences that extend far beyond the immediate harvest area.

Mature forests provide critical wildlife habitat for birds, mammals, insects, and plant species that depend on established canopy cover and stable forest conditions. Removing large areas of mature timber fragments habitat, disrupts migration and breeding patterns, and reduces biodiversity.

Old-growth and mature trees also play an important role in soil stabilization and water management. Their extensive root systems reduce erosion, improve groundwater recharge, and help maintain stream health. Harvesting operations can increase sediment runoff, degrade water quality, and alter local hydrology.

The Black Hills are additionally valued for recreation, tourism, scenic beauty, and cultural significance. Many visitors and residents are drawn to the area because of its forested landscape. Extensive logging can diminish these qualities and create long-term economic impacts on communities that depend upon outdoor recreation and tourism.

While proponents often justify harvesting as a tool to reduce wildfire risk, many scientists acknowledge that aggressive commercial logging does not always replicate natural forest processes and may, in some cases, increase fuel loads through slash, road construction, and disturbance of forest soils.

Healthy mature forests also serve as significant carbon storage systems. Large trees sequester and store carbon accumulated over decades or centuries. Their removal reduces the forest's capacity to mitigate climate impacts and delays recovery for generations.

I urge your organization to prioritize selective harvesting, ecosystem restoration, wildlife habitat protection, and long-term forest resilience over short-term timber production goals. Future generations deserve the opportunity to experience the Black Hills as a thriving and healthy forest ecosystem rather than a resource managed primarily for extraction