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Comments: I am writing to express my strong support for approval of the Mine Plan of Operations for the Bear Lodge Rare Earth Project in the Black Hills National Forest.

I believe this project represents an opportunity to demonstrate that responsible natural resource development and environmental stewardship can successfully coexist. Modern mining is significantly different than it was decades ago. Today's mining industry operates under rigorous federal and state environmental regulations, employs advanced engineering practices, and incorporates comprehensive monitoring, reclamation, and mitigation measures designed to minimize impacts to air, water, wildlife, and surrounding public lands. I appreciate that the proposed Mine Plan includes extensive environmental protection measures, reclamation requirements, and long-term monitoring throughout the life of the project.

Public lands serve many important purposes, including recreation, conservation, timber, grazing, and responsible mineral development. I believe these uses are not mutually exclusive. With proper oversight and adherence to environmental standards, carefully managed mining projects can coexist with recreation and conservation while preserving the long-term health of the National Forest.

The rare earth elements to be produced from the Bear Lodge Project are essential to many technologies that Americans rely on every day. They are critical components in advanced electronics, artificial intelligence infrastructure, renewable energy technologies, electric vehicles, medical equipment, and numerous defense applications. As the Mine Plan recognizes, these minerals are also essential to our nation's security and advanced manufacturing base.

In addition to supplying critical minerals, this project would provide meaningful economic benefits to northeastern Wyoming. It has the potential to create high-quality jobs, generate local tax revenue, support area businesses, and strengthen the regional economy for years to come. Responsible resource development has long been an important part of Wyoming's economy, and projects such as this can continue that tradition while operating under modern environmental safeguards.

Perhaps most importantly, I believe domestic production of rare earth elements is a matter of national security. The United States currently relies heavily on foreign sources of rare earth materials, particularly China, which dominates much of the global supply chain. Developing domestic sources will strengthen supply chain resilience, reduce our dependence on geopolitical competitors, and help ensure that American manufacturers and our military have reliable access to these strategically important materials.

For these reasons, I respectfully encourage the U.S. Forest Service to approve the Mine Plan of Operations for the Bear Lodge Rare Earth Project, while ensuring that the environmental protections, monitoring requirements, and reclamation commitments outlined in the plan are fully implemented. I believe this project strikes an appropriate balance between environmental stewardship, economic opportunity, and the strategic needs of the United States.

Thank you for considering my comments.

Respectfully, Mark Gonzalez