

Data Submitted (UTC 11): 8/29/2026 6:00:00 AM

First name: Meryl

Last name: Pinque

Organization:

Title:

Comments: To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to formally oppose the proposed Bear Lodge Rare Earth Project, a 100+ acre open-pit rare earth mineral mine planned adjacent to Mato Tipila (Bear Lodge/Devils Tower), approximately 12 miles north of Sundance, Wyoming. This project, which would encompass 1,060 acres of National Forest Service land and 640 acres of private land, poses serious and unacceptable risks to Indigenous sacred sites, tribal sovereignty, public health, and the surrounding environment. Violation of Treaty Rights and Tribal Sovereignty The proposed project site lies entirely within unceded territory delineated under the 1868 Treaty of Fort Laramie, a binding legal agreement between the Ojibwe (The Great Sioux Nation) and the United States government. Proceeding with this project without honoring the terms of that treaty represents a continued failure by the federal government to uphold its legal and moral obligations to tribal nations. Failure to Adequately Consult and Protect Sacred Sites Mato Tipila is one of the most sacred sites in Lakota, Cheyenne, Arapaho, and other Plains tribes' cultural and spiritual traditions. Any approval of this project must be evaluated against:

- * The American Indian Religious Freedom Act, which protects Native peoples' rights to access and use sacred sites for traditional religious purposes;
- * Executive Order 13007 on Indian Sacred Sites, which directs federal agencies to accommodate access to and ceremonial use of sacred sites and avoid adversely affecting their physical integrity;
- * Executive Order 13175, which requires meaningful consultation and coordination with tribal governments on federal actions that affect them;
- * Executive Order 14096, which commits federal agencies to environmental justice, including protection of communities disproportionately burdened by environmental harms.

I do not believe adequate government-to-government consultation with affected tribal nations has taken place, nor that the cultural and spiritual significance of this landscape has been given the weight required under these authorities. Environmental and Public Health Concerns This project raises significant environmental risks that have not been sufficiently studied or disclosed, in potential violation of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), including:

- * Degradation of local air quality from open-pit mining and mineral processing;
- * Risk of exposure to radioactive and hazardous elements associated with rare earth extraction, including acid rock drainage and radiation risks from processing rare earth-bearing ore;
- * Threats to wildlife species and their habitats, including the northern long-eared bat, a federally protected species;
- * Contamination and depletion of local water resources critical to both ecological and human communities.

The Inherent Rights of Wild Animals and the Moral Imperative to Preserve Remaining Wilderness Beyond regulatory and legal frameworks, I urge the agency to consider the fundamental, inalienable rights of the wild animals who inhabit this landscape. Species such as the northern long-eared bat, along with countless other sentient beings who call this ecosystem home, possess an intrinsic capacity to suffer, to seek safety, and to thrive undisturbed. Their sentience confers upon them a moral standing that does not depend on their utility to human industry or economic development. As one of the last remaining expanses of relatively intact wilderness in this region, this landscape carries a moral obligation to be preserved as sanctuary [mdash] not sacrificed for short-term extraction. In an era of accelerating habitat loss and biodiversity collapse, we have a profound ethical responsibility to protect what wild spaces remain, both for the sake of the creatures who depend on them and for the ecological integrity they provide to future generations. I ask the agency to weigh this moral dimension alongside its legal and environmental review, and to recognize that some places are too ecologically and ethically significant to disturb. Failure to Protect Historic and Cultural Resources The mine's impact on this culturally significant landscape must also be evaluated under the National Historic Preservation Act, which requires federal agencies to consider the effects of their actions on historic properties, including traditional cultural properties of significance to Indigenous nations. Conclusion For the reasons outlined above, I urge the responsible agency to

deny approval of the Bear Lodge Rare Earth Project as proposed. This project threatens irreparable harm to a sacred and ecologically significant landscape, disregards binding treaty obligations, and fails to meet the legal standards set forth in NEPA, the NHPA, AIRFA, and applicable executive orders. I ask that the agency fully honor its consultation obligations with the Oceti Sakowin and other affected tribal nations before any further action is taken. Thank you for considering my comment. Yours sincerely,