

# THE BLACK HILLS MUST BE PROTECTED WITH A PERMANENT MINERAL WITHDRAWAL.



## South Dakotans are coming together to stop multinational mining companies from exploiting the lands, waters and people of the Black Hills.

- Indigenous and white, old and young, veterans and civilians, of different political stripes: we all call the Black Hills home. These mountains are treasured for their sacred history, natural splendor, and world-class hunting, fishing, and mountain biking.
- The Black Hills also provide critical drinking water supplies throughout South Dakota, in particular to Ellsworth Air Force Base. These mountains are essential to safeguarding our public health and national security.
- But corporations with no ties to the region are actively bidding to rip through the forest, mine the Black Hills' natural resources for profit, and ship it out of state.
- We call upon the Secretary of the Interior to institute a permanent mineral withdrawal to safeguard all publicly-held lands in the Black Hills from mineral extraction. This will ensure that the precious forests, waters, and biodiversity of the Black Hills and western South Dakota remain protected and intact for current and future generations.

## The Black Hills hold enormous national, cultural, and ecological significance.

- Revered as the "island on the Plains", the Black Hills is an isolated forested mountain range encompassing only 1.2 million acres from Western South Dakota to northeastern Wyoming.
- The entire Black Hills are the unceded and rightful treaty territory of the Great Sioux Nation, as upheld by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1980.<sup>1</sup>
- The Lakota Sioux, who have stewarded the land for thousands of years, regard every pebble of the Black Hills as sacred ceremonial grounds. The

region's namesake is derived from the Lakota words "Paha Sapa"<sup>2</sup>, meaning "hills that are black". The Paha Sapa, also known as HeSapa, is revered as "the heart of everything that is" for the tribes and is considered one of its most sacred religious sites, as a whole.

- At the center of the Black Hills lies Pe'Sla (also known as Baldy), which has significant sacred religious purposes for the tribes. So much so that there was a collaborative fundraising effort by several tribes and the general public that successfully purchased a portion of the land<sup>4</sup> in order to protect that area.
- The Black Hills are home to many world-renowned areas iconic to American history and culture, including Mount Rushmore, the Crazy Horse Memorial, Wind Cave National Park, Bear Butte State Park, Black Elk Peak & Wilderness area, Deadwood, and the Black Hills National Forest.<sup>5</sup>

## Decades of mining in the Black Hills has seriously contaminated the landscape, reduced access to drinking water, disrupted outdoor recreation, and driven away wildlife.

- There are more than 1300 old, abandoned, and unreclaimed mines in the Black Hills.<sup>6</sup> Two have released so much contamination into their surrounding environment that EPA designated the areas as Superfund sites.
- Pollution from the Homestake Mine – once the largest gold mine in the world — contaminated 18 miles of Whitewood Creek<sup>7</sup> and travelled 175 miles downstream along the Cheyenne River, which has also been contaminated from uranium mining.
- Over \$140 million has been spent to clean up acid drainage from the now closed Gilt Edge Mine<sup>8</sup>

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smithsonian-institution/1868-two-nations-made-treaty-us-broke-it-and-plains-indian-tribes-are-still-seeking-justice-180970741/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.fs.usda.gov/blackhills>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.kotatv.com/content/news/Tribes-win-federal-trust-status-for-Pe-Sla-property-in-Black-Hills-417068793.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.fs.usda.gov/blackhills>

<sup>5</sup> <https://bheleanwateralliance.org/abandoned-mines/>

<sup>6</sup> <https://cumulis.epa.gov/supercpad/cursites/csitinfo.cfm?id=0800570&msspp=med>

<sup>7</sup> <https://cumulis.epa.gov/supercpad/SiteProfiles/index.cfm?fuseaction=second.Clean-up&id=0801668#bkground>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/south-dakota-neighborhood-hideaway-hills-giant-sinkholes/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S266675922200021X>

in the northern Black Hills, yet contamination continues to remain.

- An abandoned gypsum mine just outside of the Black Hills collapsed in 2021, forcing 100 people to abandon their houses<sup>9</sup> and additional hundreds to be devastated financially, losing all the value of their properties.
- Human exposure<sup>10</sup> to multiple small particles from mining effluent are linked to respiratory disease, cardiovascular illnesses, kidney disease<sup>11</sup>, multiple chronic inflammation<sup>12</sup>, neurodegenerative diseases<sup>13</sup> and death<sup>14</sup>.
- A report from the South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources notes that between 1982 to 2023, the five gold mining sites in the Northern Black Hills spilled a reported amount of 847,184 gallons of toxic contaminants into the surrounding environment, including cyanide solution, hydraulic fluid, diesel, and antifreeze. The parent company of the Homestake Mine alone leaked 633,000 gallons of cyanide solution in 2006.
- Mining makes up less than 1% of jobs in the Black Hills, with tourism, agriculture, and outdoor recreation each responsible for many times more jobs and income<sup>15</sup>.

**The rush to mine lithium, uranium, gold and other minerals in the Black Hills would divert billions of gallons of water from our groundwater, lakes, and rivers every year. This would significantly reduce our supply of safe drinking water.**

- As of January 2025, there are 13,104 active mining claims<sup>16</sup> in the Black Hills, comprising 271,000 acres and 22% of the entire forest.
- Proposed mining activity in the Black Hills would divert billions of gallons of water from our groundwater, lakes, and rivers every year.
- enCore Energy is trying to build a massive uranium mine known as the Dewey-Burdock Project

in the southern Black Hills in South Dakota's Fall River and Custer Counties.

- The project has requested 9,000 gallons of water per minute of operation<sup>17</sup> for 15 to 20 years. That is more groundwater<sup>18</sup> than the amount used by the entirety of Rapid City, the second-largest city in South Dakota.
- The project would impact water from 3 of the 4 major drinking water aquifers in the Black Hills,<sup>19</sup> a semi-arid area that relies on groundwater.

**The entire Black Hills must be protected with a permanent mineral withdrawal.**

- A mineral withdrawal would only stop drilling and mining – not the many other activities we enjoy in the Black Hills.
- In December 2024, the U.S. Department of Interior approved a partial mineral withdrawal<sup>20</sup> in the Black Hills National Forest, protecting 20,510 acres of land and water in the Pactola Reservoir – Upper Rapid Creek area from drilling and mining for 20 years.
  - The Pactola Reservoir supplies drinking water for Rapid City, SD and Ellsworth Air Force Base. Protecting this area from mining is essential to protecting our natural resources, public health, and national security interests.
- However, this partial withdrawal is not sufficient. The U.S. Congress must pass a permanent mineral withdrawal throughout the Black Hills' entire 1.2 million acres of federal public lands no later than August 2027. A mineral withdrawal would only stop drilling and mining – not the many other activities we enjoy in the Black Hills.
- At the least, a twenty-year mineral withdrawal must be put in place by the Secretary of the Interior.

<sup>10</sup> [https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/csem/uranium/physiological\\_effects.html](https://www.atsdr.cdc.gov/csem/uranium/physiological_effects.html)

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/pharmacology-toxicology-and-pharmaceutical-science/chronic-inflammation>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/topics/pharmacology-toxicology-and-pharmaceutical-science/degenerative-disease>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/npg/npgd0371.html>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.southdakotaworks.org/bsosnet/analyser/resultsNew.aspx?enc=WxlmJpW73xdC2Us-P5jKg2SI1N0fn70zfxOCqKBMEMG0=>

<sup>15</sup> <https://bhcleanwateralliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/bhewa-map-jan-2025.pdf>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.sdstandardnow.com/home/can-we-just-leave-the-black-hills-alone-mining-proposals-are-threatening-to-turn-our-mostly-pristine-forest-into-a-factory-for-mineral-extraction>

<sup>17</sup> <https://bhcleanwateralliance.org/water-a-national-issue/>, <sup>18</sup> <https://bhcleanwateralliance.org/water-a-national-issue/>

<sup>19</sup> [https://public-inspection.federalregister.gov/2024-30790.pdf?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=govdelivery](https://public-inspection.federalregister.gov/2024-30790.pdf?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govdelivery)