

Declaration for the Protection of the He Sapa

September 2024

We are a coalition of Indigenous Peoples, local community members, and allies who will be directly impacted by any expansion of mining activities in the Black Hills of South Dakota and Wyoming. As deeply concerned stakeholders, we are writing to express our strong opposition to any further drilling or mining in this culturally sacred and ecologically sensitive area.

HE SAPA (Black Hills) are currently threatened with destruction by a mining rush. Over 261,000 acres are under active mining claims as a result of a US law passed in 1872. This is 20% of the total Black Hills. These claims and resulting mining would permanently destroy a landscape that is sacred for all beings and the unceded treaty territory of the Oceti Sakowin and affiliated tribes. The Black Hills region is also the source of much of the surface and ground water for the northern Great Plains. Mining in the region has left a legacy of contamination and abandoned mines, and current projects would contribute to this toxic legacy.

Now, we must act strongly and immediately based on indigenous ancestral ceremony, relationship, respect, and balance. We are dedicated to stopping new mining operations that would add to past mining problems and contaminate the lands and waters, which in turn would endanger the plants, animals, and livelihoods of our communities.

Current mining is ripping minerals from this unique and important landscape -- Wamaka Ognaka Icante – “the heart of everything that is.” An influx of new proposals are poised to mine uranium, graphite, and rare earths. All mining for whatever mineral has two things in common – it tears up Unci Maka (Grandmother Earth), and it contaminates scarce water.

Time is of the essence. Individuals, organizations, and governments must do the work collectively, diplomatically, and strategically to stop mining immediately. Everyone has the responsibility to take action and to work together across all our boundaries and imaginary boundaries that can separate the people of this region. There should be a special focus on involving the youth in line with the prophecy of considering the next Seven Generations into the future of the Oceti Sakowin. The principles that must guide the actions of tribal, national, state, and local organizations and governments in ending the crisis include:

- Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledge,
- Honoring Treaty Water Rights,
- Rights of Nature,
- Stewardship of Grasslands Ecosystems,
- Tribal Data Sovereignty, and
- Free, Prior and Informed Consent as required by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

The following actions are necessary and appropriate:

- Work to oppose mining will include the many approaches needed to address an environmental crisis, including spirituality; grassroots organizing; alliance building; research and environmental monitoring of the atmosphere, land surface, and subsurface; media and social media; policy advocacy; legal action; direct action; and the universal language of art.
- No new mining or expansion of existing mines should be permitted until the reclamation and clean-up of the more than 1300 old mines and thousands of improperly plugged exploration drill holes in the Black Hills have been completed. United States federal and state governments must be held accountable to the full extent of the law, with an independent audit completed to establish accountability.
- We will work together to prevent new mining by advocating for an immediate mineral claims withdrawal for the entire Black Hills.
- We will work together to strategize, create, and advocate at the federal level for an Oceti Sakowin Mining Code for the Black Hills.