



Biden-Harris Administration Finalizes Protections for the Pactola Reservoir—Rapid Creek Watershed

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WASHINGTON — Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland has signed [Public Land Order 7956](#), finalizing protections for the Pactola Reservoir–Rapid Creek Watershed on the Black Hills National Forest from the potential effects of mineral exploration and development. This order follows a request from the U.S. Forest Service to close 20,510 acres of National Forest System land to sale or exchange and mineral entry and leasing, for a 20-year period, subject to valid existing rights. Non-federal lands and minerals are not subject to the withdrawal.

This action responds to requests from Tribes and the local community to protect important cultural and natural resources in Pennington County, South Dakota as well as the municipal water supplies for Rapid City and Ellsworth Air Force Base. With 14 miles of shoreline and depths of 150 feet, Pactola Reservoir is the largest and deepest reservoir in the Black Hills National Forest.

"The Pactola Reservoir-Rapid Creek Watershed is a treasured landscape, valued for its clean air and water, abundant recreation and ecological benefits, and sacred to multiple Tribes who call the area home," said **Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland**. "I'm proud to take action today to withdraw this area for the next 20 years, to help protect clean drinking water and ensure this special place is protected for future generations."

"We're grateful to Secretary Haaland for her decision to withdraw these lands to protect their many invaluable resources," said **Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack**. "The Pactola Reservoir–Rapid Creek Watershed provides so many benefits to the people and communities we serve, from clean water to world-class recreation, from livestock grazing to the spaces our Tribal communities consider sacred, this withdrawal will safeguard this space for decades."

The scenic Pactola Reservoir–Rapid Creek Watershed is home to world class fishing and hunting opportunities, cross-country skiing, and a broad range of year-round activities like hiking, camping and boating. Local ranchers also rely on the Pactola for summer grazing.

The area is considered a sacred landscape and traditional spiritual homeland by the Oceti Sakowin, Cheyenne, Arapaho, Arikara, Hidatsa, Mandan and Crow Tribes. The Black Hills, including the lands of the withdrawn area, contain sites sacred to these Tribes as well as areas they consider traditional cultural properties, important landscapes and areas where the Tribes pick medicine, hold spiritual ceremonies, and gather sacred foods.

The withdrawal is made pursuant to the Federal Land Policy and Management Act, which authorizes the Secretary of the Interior to withdraw federal lands aggregating 5,000 acres or more for a maximum of 20 years, subject to renewal. Only Congress can legislate a permanent withdrawal of this type.

The U.S. Forest Service initiated the proposal in March 2023, when the Bureau of Land Management published the application for withdrawal, opening a 90-day public comment period and noticing public meetings. The Forest Service and BLM also conducted two Tribal consultations in 2023.

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