



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Forest  
Service

Black Hills National Forest  
Hell Canyon Ranger District

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Custer, SD 57730  
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**File Code:** 2810; 1950

**Date:** January 27, 2026

## GREETINGS,

The Hell Canyon Ranger District is seeking your comments on a proposed exploratory drilling project in Fall River County, approximately 7.5 miles north of Edgemont, SD. Clean Nuclear Energy Corp. (Clean Nuclear), based in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada, proposes to conduct the October Jinx Exploration Drilling Project (the project).

## WHY?

The purpose of this project is to search for uranium mineralization and to conduct aquifer testing by installing four cased groundwater monitoring wells.

## WHERE, SPECIFICALLY?

On National Forest System (NFS) lands within 0.5-mile of Elbow Canyon Road (Figure 1):

- Section 25 of T7S, R2E, and
- Section 30, T7S, R3E.

## HOW MANY SITES?

Up to 17 drill sites.

- Each site: **one vertical hole drilled + temporary sump installed.**
- Figure 2 (p. 2) shows drill hole locations and planned overland routes.

## SIZE DETAILS

- **Drill Holes:** 4.75-6 in. diameter
- **Drill Site Footprint:** ~60 ft x 60 ft
- **Sumps(pits):** ~8 ft x 15 ft, 4-6 ft deep (within the footprint of each drill site): installed to settle and collect drill solids.

Figure 1 Vicinity Map



## HOW DEEP?

Drill holes will average 500 feet deep, with some reaching up to 700 feet.

## DURATION?

The Black Hills National Forest proposes to authorize Clean Nuclear for short-term exploratory drilling (1 year or less).

### DRILLING:

Expected to be completed within 1 month.

### AQUIFER TESTING:

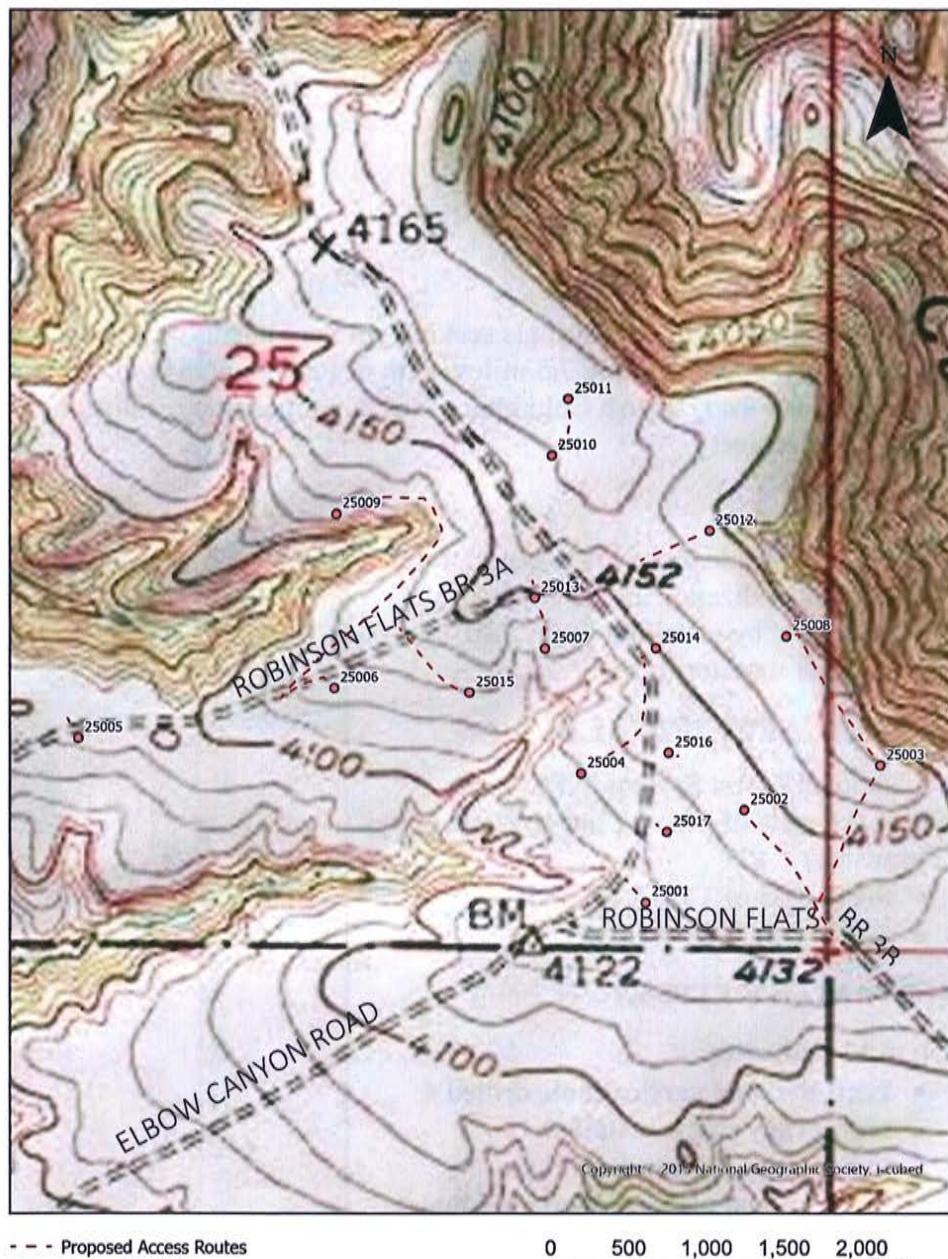
Will take approximately 3–4 weeks after drilling.

Four wells will be cased (lined) and used for groundwater monitoring:

- **one well** will be used to conduct two pumping tests, a pump rate test and a constant rate test; the remaining
- **three monitoring wells** will be used for observation and data collection.

**SUMP** (for pumped well): Discharge will go into a pit up to 50 ft x 50 ft, 4–6 ft deep.

Figure 2 Proposed Drill Locations



## WHAT HAPPENS TO THE DRILL HOLES & SUMPS?

The four cased\* (lined) wells that will be used to conduct the aquifer testing will be filled and reclaimed in accordance with USFS and State of South Dakota requirements. The remainder of the holes will be filled and reclaimed as soon as drilling activities for each individual hole are completed. The sumps (pits) will be filled with drill solids, mulched, and seeded.

\***well casing**—a tube-shaped structure put inside a well to maintain the well opening from the target groundwater to the surface (Learn About Private Water Wells | US EPA, 2025).

## WHEN?

The timeline depends upon permitting, ongoing communication with Native Nations, and environmental reviews. A tentative goal date to begin this exploration project is the fall of 2026.

## WHAT ABOUT THE WATER?

**DRILLING:** Water for drilling will come from municipal water sources in South Dakota, such as Edgemont or Hot Springs, or other permitted sources off National Forest System lands. Drill water will be stored in a water truck tank and a sump (a settling area for drill solids). After solids settle, the water will be reused.

**AQUIFER TESTING:** A temporary groundwater use/discharge permit will be obtained from SD Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources before this test. During testing, water will be pumped from one well and discharged into a sump at the drill site. The total volume of water to be pumped from this test well will be an estimated 130,000 gallons.

## WHAT IS THE FOREST SERVICE'S ROLE IN MINERALS?

The *General Mining Act of 1872*, as amended, gives all American citizens (and companies) the statutory right to prospect, explore, and develop mineral projects on public domain land open to mineral entry. The Forest Service's role is to evaluate and approve reasonable, logical, and sequential operations adhering to the *General Mining Act of 1872*, as amended, the *Organic Act of 1897* (16 U.S.C. §§ 478, 482, and 551) and Forest Service's locatable mineral regulation *36 CFR 228 Subpart A*. Under this law, and its principal amendment of July 23, 1955, qualified prospectors may search for mineral deposits on these "public domain" lands.

In accordance with *36 CFR § 228.5*, upon receipt of a proposed plan of operations, the Forest Service must analyze the proposed plan and provide a timely response. Furthermore, the Forest Service must assess whether the proposed operations will be conducted so as, where feasible, to minimize adverse environmental impacts on National Forest surface resources in accordance with *36 CFR § 228.8*.

## WHAT KIND OF ANALYSIS IS THE USFS DOING?

In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), our initial assessment is that this proposal falls within a category of actions listed in regulations at 7 CFR 1b.4 that is excluded from documentation in an environmental assessment (EA) or environmental impact statement (EIS), and that no known extraordinary circumstances exist that would preclude use of this category.

Specifically, this project falls under *7 CFR 1b.4(d)32* (USDA-32d-USFS)— "*Short-term (1 year or less) mineral, energy, or geophysical investigations and their incidental support activities that may require cross-country travel by vehicles and equipment, construction of less than 1 mile of low standard road, or use and minor repair of existing roads.*"

This Categorical Exclusion (CE) category is applicable because the project is short-term mineral (1 year or less) investigations, uses existing NFS roads and cross-country travel, and does not involve building new roads.

If the final analysis does not identify any extraordinary circumstances, this project may proceed under a Categorical Exclusion (CE). The decision will be documented in a ***Finding of Applicability and No Extraordinary Circumstances*** document (FANEC(d)). If extraordinary circumstances are found, an Environmental Assessment (EA) would be prepared to determine whether the project would have significant effects on the human environment.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

A virtual information meeting is planned for this project and will be accessible during the scoping comment period. Please see the attached flyer for the meeting link.

You can access a copy of this scoping letter, maps, the accepted Plan of Operations, and other supporting documents detailing this proposed action: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/r02/blackhills/projects/67625>; OR by:

- 1) Visiting the Black Hills National Forest website at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/blackhills>
- 2) Clicking on the green button: 'Black Hills National Forest Previous and Recent Projects'
- 3) Scrolling to the **October Jinx Project**.

## COMMENTS

Projects of this nature require a FANEC(d) but are not subject to objection. While the decision made on this project will be final, all comments on the proposed action will be considered prior to making a decision. To ensure your comments are most helpful, please submit them between **February 2 and March 3, 2026**.

Electronic comments are preferred. The best way to submit comments is online by visiting the project webpage and clicking on the "Comment/Object on Project" link.

You may also send comments to me at 1019 N. 5<sup>th</sup> Street, Custer, SD 57730; or via fax at 605-673-9350.

## QUESTIONS?

Please contact Jonathan Manning, Project Leader, Anita Swanson, District Asst. NEPA Planner, or me at the Hell Canyon Ranger District office in Custer, SD, at (605)673-9200.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



TODD BUTLER  
District Ranger

Enclosure: Scoping flyer

**REFERENCES** *Learn about private water wells* | US EPA. (2025, October 1). US EPA.  
<https://www.epa.gov/privatewells/learn-about-private-water-wells>