

FALL RIVER COUNTY COMMISSION

RESOLUTION #2025-_____

Whereas, the United States Forest Service began the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process for the development of a new Black Hills National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan (BHNFLRMP) years ago;

Whereas, on August 1, 2022, the Fall River County Commission made formal comment, which is attached hereto and incorporated herein by this reference, opposing the Potential Wilderness Inventory Process document and maps because of the extensive history of mismanagement of the Black Elk Wilderness Area by the Forest Service in the Black Hills National Forest;

Whereas, the Black Elk Wilderness Area mismanagement is well documented and notorious in South Dakota, including but not limited to the incubation of the mountain pine beetle epidemic by Forest Service's non-management of the Wilderness that has cost the adjacent landowners and the State of South Dakota millions of dollars attempting to prevent the spread of the beetle and the destruction of the health of the Forest from depredation and potential catastrophic wildfires;

Whereas, the Black Elk Wilderness Area mismanagement has also caused irreparable harm to South Dakota's tourism industry, as the health and beauty of the Forest has been harmed to such a degree that the National Park Service cancelled fireworks at Mount Rushmore during July 4th Independence Day Celebrations;

Whereas, South Dakota's largest economic industry is agriculture, and cattle grazing in the Forest reduces the fuel-load for catastrophic wildfire;

Whereas, cattle grazing and the timber industry are essential in preventing degradation of the Forest and are largely prohibited in Wilderness Areas, as illustrated by recent legal actions by environmental extremists attempting to prevent livestock grazing in Idaho and Montana Wilderness Areas;

Whereas, the Black Hills National Forest in Fall River County has largely avoided much of the depredation from the mountain pine beetle because the Black Elk Wilderness Area is many miles away from the Forest Lands of Fall River County;

Whereas, Forest Service Handbook Section 1909.12 provides that "[n]ot all lands included in the inventory and subsequent evaluations are required to be carried forward in an alternative[;]" and

Whereas, ranch families live in close proximity to the area and roads visibly traverse the area the Forest Service has inventoried for Wilderness in Fall River County and will be burdened by greater risk of depredations and catastrophic fire.

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Fall River County Commission respectfully request that the Black Hills National Forest eliminate any areas consisting of less than 5,000 acres from the Potential Wilderness Inventory Process Summary, and specifically eliminate the Potential Wilderness Inventory Area in Fall River County, as roads traverse the Area and the occupied ranch headquarters preclude a Congressional Wilderness Declaration pursuant to the Wilderness Act.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Fall River County Commission respectfully request that United State Senator John Thune, United States Senator Mike Rounds, Congressman Dusty Johnson and Governor Larry Rhoden use every option at their disposal to require the Black Hills Forest to eliminate the Potential Wilderness Inventory from any future alternatives considered during the upcoming National Environmental Policy Act Black Hills National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan Process for the all of the above-stated reasons.

Dated this 6th day of February 2025, at Hot Springs, Fall River County, South Dakota.

Joe Falkenburg, Chairman

ATTEST:

Sue Ganje, Auditor