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**RESEARCH SHOWS VAST MAJORITY OF PEOPLE WHO COMMENTED ON EPA PERMITS ARE AGAINST URANIUM MINING**

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A year ago, in May 2017, over 700 people attended hearings about the proposed in situ leach uranium mine in Custer and Fall River Counties. The hearings were sponsored by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The hearings were set up to gather public input about draft permits the EPA had issued for the proposed Dewey-Burdock project. The permits would allow a Canadian-Chinese company to use 8,500 gallons of water per minute to mine uranium in the Inyan Kara aquifer, and then pump mining waste water into the Minnelusa aquifer. Both these aquifers are used by Black Hills citizens for household and livestock purposes.

At the public hearings, over 200 people gave verbal comments, and 93% of those comments opposed the proposed uranium mining and wastewater injection.

In addition to the verbal comments at the hearings, individuals and organizations sent 1500 pages of written comments to the EPA. Now, research completed by students at Missouri State University has given us a clear picture of what those comments said. Students in an Environmental Psychology class taught by Robert G. Jones, Ph.D., read all the comments and put them into categories based on the topics covered, the writer's position on the proposed uranium project, the author's credibility, and the valence (strength of opinion and length) of the comments.

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The main topics that the students identified were:

- Concern for health effects of radioactivity
- Underground water contamination
- Land and environment destruction due to mining
- Native American consideration and consultation
- Cultural rights to water based on historic treaties

The study found that water contamination was by far the most common concern expressed in the written comments.

The study also found that 95.3% of the written comments opposed the Dewey-Burdock uranium project. As Liliias Jarding of Clean Water Alliance observed, “Like the verbal comments at the public hearings, this shows more than a super-majority of the people in the Black Hills region oppose the proposed project. It shows that nearly everyone who has developed an opinion on the topic -- and who is willing to take the time to express that opinion -- opposes the mining and deep disposal wells.”

The study said that “most of the comments in favor the project were primarily concerned with money,” and it was also clear in verbal comments at the hearings that most people who favored the project hoped to profit from it in some way.

The researchers said that 65% of the written comments had what they called “valence,” which meant they were longer than one page and made their arguments strongly. This shows that nearly two-thirds of the super-majority of people who oppose the Dewey-Burdock project feel strongly about their opposition.

The researchers also divided the comments based on their credibility. They counted comments as “credible” if they “cited sources, seemed to have more knowledge than average about the project, or if the commenter was an expert in their field.” By these criteria, 63% of comments were categorized as credible. This indicated that the majority of commenters showed clear expertise about the uranium issue.

Overall, the study shows that the people of the Black Hills region oppose uranium mining, feel strongly about that opposition, and have credible information to back up their opposition. Our public officials, both federal and state, should heed the voice of the public and turn down any future applications for permits to mine uranium in the Black Hills.

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