



**File Code:** 1950

**Date:** March 6, 2023

Greetings,

The Black Hills National Forest, Northern Hills Ranger District (NHRD), is announcing the availability of the draft environmental assessment (EA) for the Chimera Fuels Reduction Project (Chimera Project), located east of Lead/Deadwood, SD and south of Sturgis, SD, encompassing the Boulder Canyon, Galena, and Vanocker Canyon areas. You are receiving this letter because you have previously submitted comments on the Chimera Project during the scoping period or have otherwise expressed interest in the project. The draft EA is available for review by visiting the project website at: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=61689>.

The Chimera Project is being considered under two separate authorities. The first is the Healthy Forests Restoration Act of 2003 (HFRA). Projects authorized under the HFRA are subject to the pre-decisional objection process pursuant to 36 CFR 218, which provides for a shorter objection period compared to the traditional National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) provisions. The second authority being considered is the Western Firesheds Emergency Action Determination (EAD) under Section 40807 of the 2022 Bipartisan Infrastructure Law (BIL). Projects authorized under the EAD must meet specific criteria, including reduction of hazardous fuels to protect forest resources and nearby communities, and must be approved by the Chief of the U.S. Forest Service. Projects approved under the EAD are not subject to the pre-decisional objection process. The EAD provisions will be used pending approval by the Chief. If approval is not granted, HFRA authorities will be used.

Regardless of which authority is used, comments on the draft EA will be accepted for 30 days beginning the first day after a legal notice is published in the Rapid City Journal. It is expected that the legal notice will be published on March 8, 2023. If the comment period ends on a Saturday, Sunday or Federal holiday, comments will be accepted until the end of the next Federal working day. A timely submission will be determined as outlined in 36 CFR 218.25(a)(4). It is the responsibility of the sender to ensure timely receipt of any comments submitted.

Only individuals or entities who submit timely, specific written comments about this proposed action during this or another public comment period will be eligible to file an objection should this project be completed under the provisions of HFRA. If this project is completed under the provisions of the EAD, comments would still be considered, but the project would be exempt from the pre-decisional objection process, and the Responsible Official's decision would be final. All written comments received, including names and addresses of commenters, will be placed in the project file, and will become a matter of public record for this proposed action. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, anonymous comments will not provide the Agency with the ability to provide the commenter with subsequent environmental documents. Comments should be within the scope of the proposed action, have a direct relationship to the proposed action, and must include supporting reasons for the Responsible Official to consider.





United States  
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Forest  
Service

Black Hills National Forest  
Northern Hills Ranger District

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The most efficient method of submitting comments on this draft EA is by visiting the project website (<https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=61689>) and clicking the "Comment/Object on Project" link. You may also submit comments to the project leader, Chris Stores, by mail, phone, or fax to:

Northern Hills Ranger District  
2014 North Main Street  
Spearfish, SD 57783  
Telephone: (605) 642-4622  
Fax: (605) 642-4156

Office hours, for those who wish to hand deliver their comments, are 8:00 AM to 4:30 PM, Monday – Friday (except Federal holidays). Any questions regarding this project can be directed to myself or Chris Stores at the phone number listed above.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

  
STEVE KOZEL  
District Ranger

