Gold Panning and Rock Hounding in the Black Hills National Forest

The information contained below concerns gold panning and rock hounding in the Black Hills of South Dakota. While most of the National Forests in the western states are open to prospecting and mining, (panning for gold or rock hounding are forms of prospecting), it is important that the following be recognized:

First, a considerable amount of privately owned land exists within the boundaries of most National Forests and extensively within the Black Hills National Forest. These private lands are not open to prospecting or mining without the owner's permission. National Forest visitor maps, for sale at all Forest Service offices or online, show the general location of these privately owned tracts.

Second, some National Forest areas are not available for prospecting and mining, including panning for gold, rock hounding, or use of metal detectors. Those areas may include Wilderness, Acquired Mineral Lands, and Mineral Withdrawal Areas. Most developed recreation areas and areas of high resource value are withdrawn.

Third, the more easily found mineral deposits have already been discovered and "claimed" by other prospectors. Entering onto these claims for the purpose of prospecting or removing any mineral is "claim jumping" or mineral trespassing. Before you begin prospecting, check the local county records in the county courthouse for any claims in the area in which you are interested. Then check the area on the ground for any evidence of a claim that may have been staked recently. In addition, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is the federal agency responsible for managing the mineral claims on property of the United States. The BLM Montana State Office manages minerals in South Dakota and is the office in which a claim staked in South Dakota is recorded. Please contact the BLM at (406) 896-5004, if you wish to obtain mineral claims information in South Dakota.

Finally, most western states have laws regarding prospecting and mining that vary from state to state. Therefore, it is important to understand and comply with state law when panning or rock hounding on the National Forest. The State of South Dakota considers recreational mining, such as gold panning and mineral collecting that make use of hand-held equipment such as picks, shovels, gold pans, sluice boxes, or metal detectors exempt from State permit requirements. However, a State mine permit is required for portable dredges or other mechanized equipment, even for use in what you might consider recreational mining.

The Black Hills National Forest does **not** have areas identified for gold panning and rock hounding. However, depending on the location you may be able to pick up (collect) rocks and mineral specimens for your personal collection. No digging or excavating can take place when collecting. Please contact the individual Rangers District's for specifics on rock and mineral collection (See map). Please remember that collection and/or disturbance of historic artifacts is **prohibited** by Federal law.

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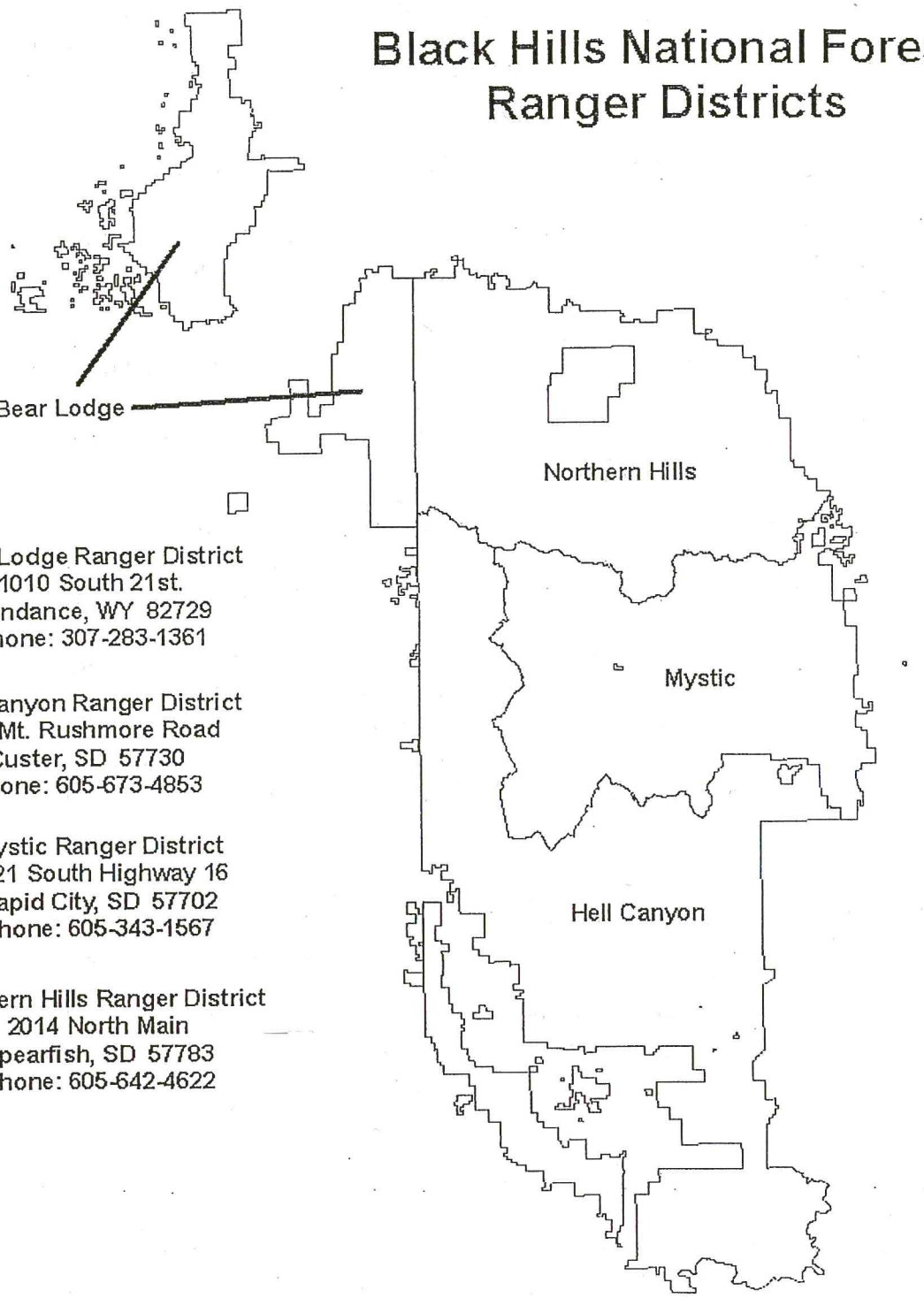
Black Hills National Forest Ranger Districts



Bear Lodge Ranger District
1010 South 21st.
Sundance, WY 82729
Phone: 307-283-1361

Hell Canyon Ranger District
330 Mt. Rushmore Road
Custer, SD 57730
Phone: 605-673-4853

Mystic Ranger District
8221 South Highway 16
Rapid City, SD 57702
Phone: 605-343-1567

Northern Hills Ranger District
2014 North Main
Spearfish, SD 57783
Phone: 605-642-4622

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