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We are writing to express our strong support for the preservation of the gypsum karst landscape in the southern Harz. This unique area, spanning parts of Lower Saxony, Thuringia, and Saxony-Anhalt, includes 16 Natura 2000 areas and the world's only sulfate karst biosphere reserve. However, it faces imminent threat from proposed exploratory drilling by the Knauf company, which seeks to mine gypsum within a protected area.

The southern Harz gypsum karst is home to rare species like the *Barbastella barbastellus* bat, fire salamanders, and the endangered slender cotton grass, along with a rich diversity of groundwater fauna. Mining here would irreversibly destroy its fragile ecosystems, caves, and springs, undermining not only the region's biodiversity but also its potential to become a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

The state of Saxony-Anhalt must recognize its responsibility to protect this internationally significant landscape. Instead of allowing mining, the state should promote sustainable alternatives to gypsum, which are already available and better aligned with climate-friendly goals.

We urge you to reject the proposed drilling and protect this irreplaceable landscape for future generations.

Signature:

Damir Janton,

Head of the Speleological Committee of Croatian Mountaineering Association

