

OPINION COLUMNS

Local View: Veterans defend 'hallowed ground' of Boundary Waters


From the column: "(A) sulfide-mining proposal threatens the very lifeblood of the Boundary Waters and northern Minnesota: clean water."



David A. Lien

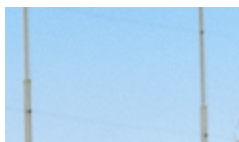
Opinion by David A. Lien

August 06, 2025 at 2:41 PM

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 Opinion

In 1909, Spanish-American War veteran and Medal of Honor recipient President Theodore Roosevelt established the Superior National Forest “for the use and benefit of the people.” Since then millions of us have traveled to its Boundary Waters — the largest wilderness east of the Rockies and north of the Everglades — to camp, hike, hunt, fish, and greatest destinations, [according to National Geographic](https://www.nationalgeographic.com)(<https://www.nationalgeographic.com>



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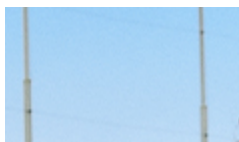
le/canoe-boundary-waters) , and is known as “America’s Wilderness.”

Bill Rom, a U.S. Navy veteran, opened Canoe Country Outfitters in Ely in 1946 and became a leader in the fight for the federal Wilderness Act, which passed in 1964. He conceived of the outfitting business while serving in the Navy during World War II as an antidote to his piercing homesickness for northern Minnesota’s wild lake country. Both Roosevelt and Rom were vilified(https://www.backcountryhunters.org/public_land_are_not_to_be_gifted_to_foreign_mining_billionaires) for advocating on behalf of our wild public lands, waters, and wildlife, but we have them (and many others) to thank for our great public-lands estate.

Today’s veterans are following in their footsteps, defending(https://www.grandrapidsmn.com/opinion/veterans-defend-boundary-waters-from-sulfide-ore-copper-mining-proposals/article_2551a90a-9f4b-11e9-8910-5b6f72eb6c47.html) the Superior National Forest and Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness from a proposal by Chilean billionaires (Antofagasta) to mine sulfide-ore deposits in the region. This sulfide-mining proposal threatens the very lifeblood of the Boundary Waters and northern Minnesota: clean water.

“Every sulfide mine (in) a water-rich environment, like Minnesota, has contaminated surface and/or groundwater with toxic acid mine drainage: 100 percent failure rate,” I wrote in a May 2024 News Tribune commentary(<https://www.duluthnewstribune.com/opinion/columns/local-view-hunters-anglers-vets-want-mining-companies-to-prove-it-first>) . “A foreign-owned mining company, Antofagasta of Chile, doing business in Minnesota as Twin Metals, is looking to build a copper-ore sulfide mine upstream from the Boundary Waters near Ely.”

“We’re at a pivotal moment in the history of conservation and management of our public lands. Our public lands are no longer just a resource. They are a way of life. As Hunters and Anglers editor



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wrote(https://www.backcountryhunters.org/a_brief_bha_history_iii_taking_the_initiative_and_raisin_hell) in spring in the Backcountry Journal. “Those advocating for resource extraction in irreplaceable wild landscapes, such as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and Boundary Waters, are becoming increasingly vocal.”

“For those involved in Backcountry Hunters and Anglers’ Armed Forces Initiative (AFI), these aren’t just parcels on a map. They’re hallowed ground,” Backcountry Hunters and Anglers AFI Coordinator Bryan Jones, a U.S. Marine Corps veteran, wrote in a [letter\(https://www.backcountryhunters.org/armed_forces_initiative_sends_letter_to_congress\)](https://www.backcountryhunters.org/armed_forces_initiative_sends_letter_to_congress) objecting to a proposed sell-off of more than 3 million acres of public lands.

The letter was sent to all 541 members of Congress in June, arguing some of what’s at risk if we allow billionaire buzzards to invade and sully our last pristine waterways and wildlands.

“According to the Department of the Interior, recreation and resource-based jobs on public lands supported 949,000 American paychecks and generated \$252 billion in economic output in 2023,” the letter stated. “Trailheads feed small-town diners; boat ramps keep outfitters open; hunting seasons put guides, game processors, and rural hotels to work. The Joint Economic Committee has likewise recognized the outsized mental health benefits of outdoor access — especially for military families.”

“For many of us, these wild places are the last bridge between the war we left behind and the peace we still seek,” the letter emphasized.

World War II veteran Rom found that same bridge and hallowed ground in the Boundary Waters. “He felt the wilderness was the best economy for Ely, because it was forever,” his daughter, Becky Rom, the national chair of the Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters,

said(https://www.backcountryhunters.org/a_brief_bha_history_iii_taking_the_initiative_and_raisin_hell) in spring in the Backcountry Journal. “Those advocating for resource extraction in irreplaceable wild landscapes, such as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and Boundary Waters, are becoming increasingly vocal.”



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I agree. The response to foreign billionaires must be: Not. One.

Acre! As I

wrote(<https://www.duluthnewstribune.com/opinion/columns/local-view-public-lands-are-not-to-be-gifted-to-foreign-mining-billionaires>) on June 29 in the News Tribune, “Our public lands are not commodities to be auctioned off, sold, or gifted to Chilean (or any other) billionaires.”

This was why the Backcountry Hunters and Anglers was built, for this opportunity, for this fight. We know the billionaire buzzards will be back, and we’ll be waiting.

[Join\(https://www.backcountryhunters.org/join\)](https://www.backcountryhunters.org/join) us!

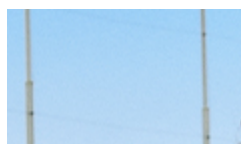
David A. Lien of Colorado Springs, Colorado, and formerly of Grand Rapids, is the founder and former chair of the Minnesota Backcountry Hunters and Anglers ([backcountryhunters.org\(http://backcountryhunters.org/\)](http://backcountryhunters.org/)). He’s also a former Air Force missile launch officer and author(<https://muckrack.com/david-lien/articles>) . In 2014, he was recognized by Field & Stream as a “Hero of Conservation.” He wrote this commentary exclusively for the News Tribune and urges action at [backcountryhunters.org/take_action#/\(https://www.backcountryhunters.org/take_action#/\)](https://www.backcountryhunters.org/take_action#/) .

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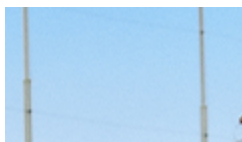
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