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Guided by science and public opinion, land managers say “no” to proposed sulfide-ore copper mines threatening Minnesota’s iconic Boundary Waters Wilderness

Broad coalition of Minnesota business leaders, sportsmen, veterans and conservationists praise the decision & urge permanent protection

Next steps: Comprehensive environmental review will determine whether the watershed – which drives enormous economic activity as America’s most popular wilderness area – should be removed from the federal mining program altogether

Ely, MN—[Today](#), guided by science and public opinion, federal agencies charged with stewardship of taxpayer-owned public lands denied the renewal of two mineral leases adjacent to Minnesota’s iconic Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) and upstream of Voyageurs National Park. The decision halts a proposed sulfide-ore copper mine project from destroying the clean waters of America’s most popular wilderness area – a prime hunting, fishing and recreation destination that helps support 17,000 jobs and drive \$850 million in [economic activity](#) annually. [Sixty-seven percent of Minnesotans](#) opposed the project.

In addition, federal land managers announced they will begin a comprehensive environmental review to determine whether the watershed of the BWCA is the wrong place for sulfide-ore copper mining and should be removed from the federal mining program altogether. [Numerous scientific studies](#) show the dramatic risk such a mine would pose to the water-intensive, ecologically sensitive wilderness of the Boundary Waters. [Nearly 8 in 10 Minnesotans](#) support such a study.

This past summer, more than 74,000 people and 200 sportsmen’s organizations, businesses, and conservation groups [sent letters](#) expressing support for not renewing the expired Twin Metals leases and protecting the BWCA watershed. [Rural communities](#) in particular benefit from recreation in U.S. National Forests, which nationally drive \$11 billion in consumer spending within 50 miles of forest boundaries.

“The Boundary Waters is a special place for Minnesotans who love hunting, fishing and recreation and who depend on thousands of jobs sustained by America’s most-popular wilderness,” said Becky Rom, National Chair of the Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters. **“Science has clearly shown that copper mining would inflict devastating harm on this priceless wilderness. Today’s decision reflects strong support from a majority of Minnesotans who want to prioritize the wide-ranging value our communities gain from a healthy Boundary Waters, rather than open an industrial mining zone less than a mile from the wilderness edge.”**

Rom added: **“It’s a strong first step, but there is still a lot of work to do to ensure we can protect the BWCA for future generations. Our coalition keeps growing as sportsmen, veterans, businesses and other interests sign on to support our efforts.”**

Additional quotes from members of this growing coalition can be found below.

Expired mineral leases held by Twin Metals were initially issued in 1966, before modern American environmental laws existed, including the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, and the law that requires environmental impacts to be considered before decisions are made regarding where mines can be sited. As a result, these leases never underwent environmental review.

The environmental review will be a comprehensive, watershed level analysis that will look at the value of the land and water, including their economic, social and cultural importance. The Boundary Waters Wilderness is a wild landscape of lakes, streams, woods, and wildlife covering 1.1 million acres along the Canadian border. It is the most heavily visited wilderness area in the United States, attracting more than 250,000 visitors each year from all over the world.

These decisions only affect proposed copper nickel mining in the Boundary Waters watershed and will not affect Minnesota’s taconite industry. Taconite and other iron deposits are in a different geography and in a different type of ore.

Sulfide-ore copper mining – [one of the most toxic industries in America](#)– has never been done before in Minnesota. The Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters is a broad national coalition of business people, sportsmen, veterans, outdoor enthusiasts, conservationists, and others that was founded by residents of Ely, Minnesota in 2013. The Campaign works to protect the interests of the people of the United States in a healthy Boundary Waters Wilderness. A strong majority of Minnesotans opposed the Twin Metals project, including 61 percent of residents in Minnesota’s 8th Congressional District (which includes the Iron Range and Duluth).

What people are saying:

Land Tawney, President & CEO of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers
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“The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness is one of the most iconic fishing and hunting destinations in America. The recent decision by federal land managers – to block mining leases that would endanger the Boundary Waters watershed – deserves praise not only from Backcountry Hunters & Anglers and BHA’s Minnesota chapter in particular, but from sportsmen

and women from all across the country. Cheers with a large glass of cold, clean water, preferably right out of the wilderness!”

Darrell Spencer, Sportsman & Duluth Resident

“If allowed, sulfide-ore copper mining development in the watershed of the BWCAW would inevitably pollute surrounding lakes' groundwater and downstream waters in the BWCAW. The development of a mine would taint the quality and reputation of the BWCAW as a hunting and fishing paradise and harm my enjoyment of the BWCAW as a place to travel through, hunt, and fish. I would worry about my kids, my wife, or myself drinking the water and eating fish caught in the BWCAW.”

Collin O’Mara, President & CEO of the National Wildlife Federation

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“Federal land managers have wisely recognized that the Boundary Waters is an American crown jewel too special to risk. Too special for anglers, too special for hunters, too special for canoeists and communities and wildlife. This decision recognizes that the long term values for the local economy and future generations far outweigh the speculative short term benefits of sulfide mining in such a cherished landscape.”

Thomas Heffelfinger, former U.S. Attorney under Presidents George H.W. Bush & George W. Bush

"The Boundary Waters watershed is the crown jewel of the state of Minnesota. It is our responsibility to protect and preserve these waters and pristine ecosystem now for future generations."

Steve Piragis, Ely Resident & Owner of Piragis Northwoods Company

"I, like most of our clients, enjoy fishing the wilderness lakes of the BWCAW. More than 50 percent of our clients travel by canoe in the region. Any industrialization on the perimeter of the Wilderness will inevitably degrade the wilderness and change the purity of this experience. Basswood Lake lies just downstream from the proposed Twin Metals sulfide-ore mine. If acid and heavy metals pollute the Kawishiwi River, as I believe they inevitably will, Basswood Lake will be among the first to be affected. It would not take long for recreational economy we have worked so hard to develop for the last 100 years in Ely to be adversely affected."

Theodore Roosevelt IV

“When Theodore Roosevelt created the Superior National Forest in 1909 he envisioned it as a sacred trust to be passed down from generation to generation. Today that trust proved itself in worthy hands as federal land managers put the good of all Americans ahead of the parochial interest of the few. While I do not like putting words in a dead man’s mouth I am confident he is looking down and nodding in proud approval.”

Gregg Wollner, Executive Vice President for Twin Cities-based fishing tackle maker Rapala & former Chairman of the Board for the American Sportfishing Association

"As someone who has enjoyed fishing this area with my son, I was pleased to hear that

recognized the significance of the area. Companies like Rapala rely on clean water and healthy fisheries to support world class fishing opportunities.”

Vice President Walter Mondale

“Our nation’s wilderness is our heritage--and today marks another victory in the ongoing fight to preserve that heritage for our children and our children’s children. The decisions by the US Forest Service and Interior Department are testaments to the potential of our government to do good by the people, for the people. They listened to the public. They followed the science. And they reached the right conclusion. They will be thanked for generations to come.”

Erik Packard, U.S. Military Veteran

“After my last tour in Iraq I came home suffering from undiagnosed PTSD, depression and anxiety. After struggling with it for years I attempted suicide, and although treatment through the VA made me not want to die, it didn't make me want to live. I found out about a dog sledding trip in the BWCAW, a lifelong dream, and decided to go. On that trip I lost and found many things. I smelled the cold crisp air and found that devoid of all human sound, I could hear the sounds of the wilderness. I could hear the quiet. I could feel the poison of war starting to leave my body and the spark of life reignite within me.”

Jamie Williams, President of The Wilderness Society

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“We applaud the Forest Service for preventing a dangerous mining operation in the priceless watershed of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW), as well as the Interior Department’s decision to study whether the watershed of the BWCAW is the wrong place for sulfide-ore copper mining. First conserved for its wilderness values 90 years ago, the Boundary Waters is one of the original treasures protected by the 1964 Wilderness Act. It has been a favorite destination for millions of Americans who marvel at its unique waterways and forests and is a vital component of Minnesota’s economy. For these reasons, the Boundary Waters must be protected for all time, and this decision by the Forest Service is a critical first step towards that goal.”

Theresa Pierno, President & CEO for National Parks Conservation Association

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“Our national parks are important to our economy and to who we are as a nation, and we must do all we can to protect them. Voyageurs National Park is one such place and that is why the decision to halt this mining operation is so critical. Pollution from this mine would have flowed downstream towards Voyageurs, threatening the park’s prized fishing and wildlife, water quality and the visitor experience. With contaminants like mercury already impairing park waters and requiring fish advisories, we cannot allow this type of mining to take place within the watershed. Today’s decision recognizes the need for us to take steps to permanently protect these important places, today and well into the future.”

Gene Karpinski, President of the League of Conservation Voters

“The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness is one of the most iconic and scenic places in the nation and it absolutely deserves to be protected from foreign mining interests who would put the area's countless lakes and streams at tremendous risk. We’re thrilled that the Forest Service has

decided to cancel future leases in this pristine watershed and applaud federal land managers for moving forward with a comprehensive environmental review to hear from the public about leasing for toxic mining on the edge of one of our nation's most majestic wilderness area."

Bob Irvin, President of American Rivers

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"This decision is great news for the Boundary Waters and the more than 250,000 Americans who visit annually to paddle, fish, and camp. Clean water and healthy rivers will deliver far more long-term value to residents and visitors than a risky mining operation. American Rivers named the South Kawishiwi River and the Boundary Waters one of America's Most Endangered Rivers in 2013, and we are very pleased that this special place will now be saved."

Dr. Tom Myers, PhD, hydrologist

"If sulfide mines are developed in the Rainy Headwaters [part of the Boundary Waters watershed], it is not a question of whether, but when, a leak will occur that will have major impacts on the water quality of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness."

Things to Know

1. The Boundary Waters Wilderness is one of the most spectacular places in America and a key driver of Northeastern Minnesota's economy. The Boundary Waters Wilderness is a wild landscape of lakes, streams, woods, and wildlife covering 1.1 million acres along the Canadian border. It is the most heavily visited Wilderness Area in the United States, attracting more than 250,000 visitors each year from all over the world. It helps [drive more than \\$850 million](#) in economic activity every year that [supports nearly 17,000 jobs](#).

2. Sulfide-ore copper mining is risky. EPA studies show this type of metal mining to be one of the most toxic industries in America. [A peer-reviewed study](#) of water quality impacts from sulfide-ore copper mines found that 100% of those studied (which produced 89% of the US's copper supply) experienced pipeline spills or other accidental releases. In August 2014, [the Mount Polley copper and gold mine in British Columbia had a tailings dam breach](#) that released 4.5 million cubic meters of toxic slurry into a lake and river system that was a priceless salmon spawning area.

3. [Multiple rigorous scientific studies](#), including one published recently in the Journal of Hydrology, show that pollution from these proposed sulfide-ore mine sites would flow into the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.

4. [Two-thirds of Minnesotans do not want a sulfide-ore mine near the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness](#). Statewide, the poll found that 67% of Minnesotans (83 percent of Democrats, 57 percent of Independents and 54 percent of Republicans) oppose mines near the Boundary Waters. Polls found that 61 percent of those questioned who live in Minnesota's Eighth Congressional District — which includes the Iron Range and Duluth — oppose mines near the Wilderness. Nearly 8 in 10 Minnesotans support a two-year study to gather more information on the dangers of sulfide-ore copper mining to Boundary Waters.

5. The Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters and its partners [delivered more than 74,000 thousand petitions](#) urging the US Forest Service to withhold consent for renewal of Twin Metals leases.

6. These decisions only affect proposed copper nickel mining in the Boundary Waters watershed and will not affect Minnesota's taconite industry. Taconite and other iron deposits are in a different geography and in a different type of ore.

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