

**For Immediate Release**

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# SAVE THE BOUNDARY WATERS

## **Boundary Waters Permanent Protection Bill Introduced in Minnesota State Legislature**

*Nearly 70% of Minnesotans support permanently protecting the BWCAW, America's most popular Wilderness, from threats like sulfide-ore copper mining*

**Ely, MN--** Today the Boundary Waters Permanent Protection Bill (S.F. 763/H.F. 840) was introduced in both the Minnesota House and Senate by chief authors Representative Kelly Morrison and Senator Steve Cwodzinski. The bill extends the existing permanent state ban on mining in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) to also prohibit both sulfide-ore copper mining and issuance of sulfide-ore copper mining permits, licenses, and leases on state-owned land within the BWCAW's watershed. Allowing copper mining in the watershed of BWCAW would forever degrade the Wilderness' ecosystem and the landscape and result in polluted water and air, industrial-level noise, loss of habitat and wildlife, and damage to the regional amenity-based economy in violation of existing state and federal laws that mandate permanent protection of the BWCAW from such harms.

**"The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness is an incomparable and irreplaceable part of Minnesota's outdoor heritage and legacy,"** said State Rep. Kelly Morrison. **"It is a state and national treasure beloved by Minnesotans and Americans from across the country for its clean water, magnificent wildlife, and unmatched opportunities for year-round outdoor recreation. Only a permanent ban on sulfide-ore copper mining in the headwaters of the BWCAW can assure its protection for our children and future generations."**

The Boundary Waters Permanent Protection Bill and its federal counterpart, H.R. 5598 to be introduced by U.S. Congresswoman Betty McCollum (MN-04), close a critical gap in existing state and federal statutes that mandate the permanent protection of the BWCAW from any pollution, ecosystem alteration, and risk of degradation to its air, water, forested landscape, or other natural conditions. Since the 1970s, these existing statutes have permanently banned all mining *inside* the BWCAW and in a narrow buffer area. The critical gap addressed by the state and federal bills is the inadequacy of that existing buffer area to protect the BWCAW from the irreversible damage and environmental degradation that would result from sulfide-ore copper mining within the watershed that flows directly into the BWCAW's interconnected water system. To close this gap, the Boundary Waters Permanent Protection Bill extends the existing state ban on mining in the BWCAW to also prohibit both sulfide-ore copper mining and issuance of sulfide-ore copper mining permits, licenses, and leases on state-owned land within the Rainy River Headwaters portion of the Boundary Waters watershed. The federal bill, H.R. 5598, enacts the same prohibitions on federal lands within the watershed.

**"The only way to permanently protect the Wilderness is by banning copper mining in the watershed,"** said Tom Landwehr, Executive Director of the Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters. **"These legislators are leading on the issue of Boundary Waters protection and we are incredibly grateful for their commitment to protecting the Minnesota way of life."**

Both public and private [polling](#) over the last several years has shown that nearly 70% of Minnesotans support permanent protection for the Boundary Waters, including Democrats, Republicans, and Independents.

**"Protecting the Boundary Waters and its clean water is imperative,"** said State Senator Steve Cwodzinski. **"Minnesotans know that the value of clean water can't be measured in dollars and cents. In addition to permanently damaging the Boundary Waters and surrounding environment, water contamination from sulfide-ore copper mining risks the health of hundreds of thousands of individuals, children, and families who visit the Boundary Waters each year or who call the Arrowhead region home."**

Scientific modelling and empirical evidence make clear that sulfide-ore copper mining in the watershed of the Boundary Waters poses a near certain risk of contamination of these pristine waters. Researchers surveying sulfide-ore copper mines in North America found that every single mine has contaminated surrounding water and 92% have failed to adequately contain seepage from waste streams resulting in severe impacts to water quality.

**"Sulfide-ore copper mining is identified every year by the EPA as the highest emitter of toxic material,"** said State Rep. Jim Davnie, a co-author of the bill. **"Putting America's most toxic industry next to America's most visited Wilderness is sheer madness and demonstrates why a permanent ban is a non-negotiable necessity for protecting the BWCAW."**

Copper mining near the Boundary Waters is also a net negative for the local economy. An independent study by Harvard University economist and former member of President Obama's council of economic advisors James Stock found that over a twenty year period a ban on copper mining in the Wilderness watershed would result in more jobs and more income to the region than with copper mining.

**"As a business owner I can tell you that a protected Boundary Waters is a golden goose,"** said Steve Piragis, owner of Piragis Northwoods, **"and this year was one of the best years we've ever had. A copper mine would kill my business and the small businesses of hundreds of others."**

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