

For Immediate Release

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SAVE THE BOUNDARY WATERS

President's Executive Order on Climate Change will Preserve 30 Percent of US Land and Water by 2030

Preserving Minnesota's Boundary Waters Wilderness is key to solving the climate and extinction crisis

Ely, MN--Today President Biden signed a laudable Executive Order that directs the government to conserve 30 percent of all land and water within the United States by 2030, creates a task force to assemble a government-wide action plan for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and elevates climate change to a national security priority. A key part of fulfilling the 'whole-of-government' approach to the climate crisis should include development of specific actions by federal land management agencies to determine which public lands should be protected from mining and other extraction. Protecting and preserving Minnesota's Boundary Waters Wilderness and its surrounding boreal forests from sulfide-ore copper mining is a key part of the climate solution, including carbon sequestration and climate adaptability and resilience.

"Today's Executive Order is a visionary step forward to protect our world for our children and children's children. It sets a national 30X30 land and water conservation goal and launches a process of engagement for identifying strategies. Among the first 30X30 actions should be restoration and expansion of protections for the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and its watershed to ban sulfide-ore copper mining on nearby public lands. Only a ban would guarantee that the Wilderness and the larger 4.3-million-acre Quetico Superior ecosystem remain biologically and ecologically intact. This region has been identified as crucial to our ability to sustain biodiversity in the face of a changing climate," said Becky Rom,

National Chair of the Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters. "The Order marks a return to a government committed to decision-making rooted in science."

The 4.3 million-acre Quetico-Superior region is primarily boreal forest. Boreal forests store more carbon than any other terrestrial ecosystem — almost twice as much per acre as tropical forests. Destruction of boreal forest for industrial mining is a double whammy — the release of much of that carbon into the atmosphere and the loss of the capacity of the land to take up carbon in the future. The loss is even greater if wetlands are destroyed. Soil carbon levels in wetlands are nearly double the level in the terrestrial boreal forest.

The Boundary Waters is also crucial for climate adaptation and resilience. The Wilderness Society identified 74 places in the United States that are crucial to our ability to sustain biodiversity in the face of a changing climate. These areas have three essential characteristics: (1) an especially high degree of wildness; (2) connectivity to existing protected areas; and (3) diversity of unprotected species and ecosystem types. The analysis found that the Quetico-Superior region is one of the top places in the nation with this "Wildland Conservation Value."

A recent study by The Nature Conservancy with similar findings underscores the necessity of keeping these areas intact and undeveloped. Consistent with this, The Nature Conservancy, The Conservation Fund, and The Trust for Public Land have acquired large swaths of land across northern Minnesota to keep them protected. Allowing the creation of an industrial mining zone in the watershed of the Boundary Waters would undermine the work that these and other organizations are doing to prepare us for the future.

Minnesotans support protecting the Boundary Waters Wilderness from sulfide-ore copper mining by wide margins. Polling from July 2020 shows that 68% of Minnesotans support a permanent ban on copper mining near the Boundary Waters, including by a 15 point margin in Northeastern Minnesota (MN CD 8).

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