

For Immediate Release

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SAVE THE BOUNDARY WATERS

[STAR TRIBUNE: Timely leadership by Tina Smith on BWCA](#)

Minnesota Senator has sensibly called for study on mining's risks to be completed

Today, the Star Tribune published an editorial praising US Senator Tina Smith for her leadership in calling for a re-initiation of a mineral withdrawal process for federal lands near the Boundary Waters. The process begins with a comprehensive study of the economic, ecological, cultural, and environmental impacts of mining on the doorstep of the Wilderness. Based on the results of the study the Department of Interior could ban mining on federal lands in the BWCA watershed for up to twenty years. A similar study was begun by the Obama administration but abruptly cancelled by the Trump administration before being finalized and the background data was hidden from Congress and the public. Over 180,000 people commented in support of that mineral withdrawal.

The Star Tribune editorial reads, in part:

With former Vice President Walter Mondale's passing, Minnesota lost not only a statesman but one of its foremost conservationists.

Mondale, who died April 19, wielded his influence in office and afterward to keep the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCA) and the nation's waterways clean and pristine for future generations to enjoy.

It's up to Minnesota's next generation of elected leaders to fill this void. A recent strong, clear call by U.S. Sen. Tina Smith for completion of an aborted scientific study of mining's risks to the BWCA watershed is a hopeful sign.

Smith's timely leadership reflects the importance that Minnesotans put on safeguarding the watery northern Minnesota wilderness from potential mining pollution. It also honors Mondale's environmental protection legacy and suggests that this vital work will not flag in his absence.

In late 2019, a Star Tribune Editorial Board special report spotlighted the risky location of Twin Metals Minnesota's proposed underground copper mine project. The mine, which is still years away from becoming a reality, would be built on the doorstep of the federally protected wilderness and aboveground operations would hug the shoreline of a lake that drains directly into the BWCA watershed.

The report, "Not This Mine. Not This Location," also outlined maneuvering by the Trump administration to speed the project's approval. One particularly dubious example: halting a nearly completed two-year review of copper mining's risks, and then keeping the results a secret despite requests to make them public from congressional representatives and the Editorial Board.

A March 26 letter from Smith to the Biden administration makes an eminently sensible request. She asks that it move forward in determining whether the copper and other precious metals "can be safely mined in the Rainy River Watershed in northeastern Minnesota and whether watershed protections are warranted." Smith estimated that a new study could be completed in less than two years given the prior work done on it.

Smith's leadership on this is important and reflects the concerns of the majority of Minnesotans. A 2020 Star Tribune/Minnesota Public Radio poll found "Minnesota voters overwhelmingly oppose new mining near the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness." Completing the halted analysis also would provide the scientific and economic underpinnings necessary to make informed decisions on mining in the BWCA watershed.

Last week, Rep. Betty McCollum (D-MN) [introduced](#) legislation to permanently protect the Boundary Waters from sulfide-ore copper mining. The legislation has 35 co-sponsors including Reps. Dean Phillips and Ilhan Omar from Minnesota, Natural Resources Committee Chair Raúl Grijalva (D-AZ), and Subcommittee Chair Alan Lowenthal (D-CA).

The Boundary Waters is the most heavily visited wilderness area in the United States, attracting more than 155,000 visitors from all over the world and helps drive more than [\\$900 million](#) in annual economic activity that helps support over 17,000 jobs. [A peer-reviewed independent study](#) from Harvard University showed that protecting the Boundary Waters from a proposed Twin Metals sulfide-ore copper mine would result in dramatically more jobs and more income over a 20-year period.

In 2016 the US Forest Service terminated Chilean mining conglomerate Antofagasta's Twin Metals project on the doorstep of the Boundary Waters after a multi-year review determined that sulfide-ore copper mining posed an unacceptable risk of irreparable harm to the Wilderness. The Forest Service began a study to withdraw federal minerals in the watershed of the Boundary Waters from mining for twenty years. The Trump administration unlawfully overturned those decisions and began fast-tracking the project. The Biden administration has issued a stay on litigation regarding Twin Metals and is currently reviewing the project.

You can read the full editorial [here](#).