

## **Mining Threat Puts Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness on List of *America's Most Endangered Rivers*® of 2018**

WASHINGTON D.C.. - American Rivers today named the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness among America's Most Endangered Rivers® of 2018, citing the grave threat a proposed copper mine poses to America's most popular wilderness. American Rivers and its partners called on the Trump administration and Congress to permanently protect this well-loved Wilderness by resisting mining-industry proposals and upholding conservation law and water quality standards.

"This is a critical year for the people of this region to decide what kind of future we want for our rivers and clean water," said Jessie Thomas-Blate with American Rivers. "Ruining the Boundary Waters' untouched ecosystem and endangering the 27,000 jobs it supports is out of line with Minnesota's values. It's a risk that Minnesotans simply cannot afford."

The Boundary Waters contains 1.1 million acres of interconnected rivers and lakes along the U.S.-Canada border. This Wilderness lies within the Superior National Forest and has over 1,200 miles of canoe and kayak routes and 237.5 miles of hiking trails. Its granite cliffs, boreal forest and clean waters are home to moose, bear, lynx, bald eagles, loons, wolves, walleye, northern pike and smallmouth bass. The Boundary Waters attracts more than 150,000 visitors per year for its world-class canoeing, kayaking, camping, hiking, fishing and other outdoor recreation activities.

Despite the popularity and ecological and cultural worth of this pristine Wilderness, a massive proposed copper-nickel mine threatens to destroy it. Twin Metals, owned by Chilean mining company Antofagasta, is seeking permits to build Minnesota's largest sulfide-ore copper mine, near the edge of the Boundary Waters along the banks of the Kawishiwi River.

Hardrock mining is notoriously dirty—the most toxic industry in America, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Acid mine drainage pollutes water, destroys critical habitat for aquatic and terrestrial species, disrupts biodiversity of surrounding forests and soils, and poses a serious risk to human health. Scientific and economic studies show that sulfide-ore copper mining along lakes and streams that flow into the Boundary Waters would endanger not only premier fishing, hunting and other recreational activities, but also the stable, sustainable economy of Northeastern Minnesota. Economic analysis shows that sulfide-ore copper mining could lead to the loss of up to 22,000 jobs, \$1.6 billion in annual income, and \$509 million in private property values.

"Similar mines elsewhere generate hundreds of millions of tons of waste rock and require active water management for hundreds or even thousands of years," said Thomas-Blate. "Twin Metals and other companies with mining interests in the region would transform the edge of this unique Wilderness into an industrial mining zone. The likelihood of a water contamination event in the future is high."

"Recent polling found that 70 percent of Minnesotans are opposed to this risky type of mining anywhere near the Boundary Waters. Since American Rivers first designated the Boundary Waters as one of *America's Most Endangered Rivers*® in 2013, more Minnesotans are waking up to the threats caused by this Chilean mining giant," said Doug Niemela of Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness. "These folks

are not sitting idly by while these threats gain new life through this Administration. Hunters and anglers, business owners, Wilderness edge camps, nurses and physicians, students and teachers are among those making their voices heard; they are attending meetings, making phone calls, writing letters and emails, even traveling to Washington D.C. to meet with legislators to voice their opposition to putting America's most toxic industry next to America's most visited Wilderness."

Under the Obama Administration, the U.S. Forest Service advanced toward semi-permanent protection of the Boundary Waters from mining, including: (i) denial of renewal requests for federal mining leases, and (ii) initiating an environmental review process to consider a 20-year mining ban for 234,328 acres of Superior National Forest lands near the Boundary Waters.

However, the Trump Administration has now reversed its legal position on the denied mineral leases, opening the door to consider renewal of the previously denied federal mining leases in the headwaters of the Boundary Waters. Further, the Trump Administration has scaled back its evaluation of the impact of a future mining ban; the U.S. Forest Service is proceeding with an Environmental Assessment of the withdrawal proposal.

To protect the watershed of the Boundary Waters from sulfide-ore copper mining, the U.S. Forest Service must prepare a rigorous, unbiased and science-based environmental study of the potentially devastating impacts of mining near the Boundary Waters. With scientific support, the U.S. Forest Service should submit a strong recommendation to Department of Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke to instate a 20-year ban (the maximum currently allowed by law) on mining on 234,328 acres of Superior National Forest lands.

"Last year, The Wilderness Society identified the Boundary Waters as one of 15 treasured but at-risk places in America that are far 'Too Wild to Drill,'" said Chris Rackens with The Wilderness Society. "This paradise for canoeing, camping and fishing, faces threats posed by sulfide-ore mining being pushed by foreign mining companies, the Trump Administration and their allies in Congress. Decades of careful stewardship would be undone if sulfide-ore mining were allowed to pollute the sensitive habitat and connected waterways of the Boundary Waters Wilderness, which contain 20 percent of all the fresh water in the National Forest System."

"The Boundary Waters serves as critical habitat for wildlife, unique plant species, and as an invaluable escape into America's most popular wilderness area. Development on the border of this rich and pristine ecosystem threatens the health and wellness of this critical watershed and harms the economic vitality of Minnesota's destination towns," said Lauren Berutich with Great Old Broads for Wilderness. "Sulfide-ore copper mining should be permanently banned from this area. Americans treasure public lands and waters and they deserve our protection."

The annual *America's Most Endangered Rivers* report is a list of rivers at a crossroads, where key decisions in the coming months will determine the rivers' fates. Over the years, the report has helped spur many successes including the removal of outdated dams, the protection of rivers with Wild and Scenic designations, and the prevention of harmful development and pollution.

The Boundary Waters were previously included on this list in 2013 for this same mining issue. Other rivers in the region listed as most endangered in recent years include the Menominee River (2017), St. Louis River (2015), and Little Plover River (2013).

## **America's Most Endangered Rivers® of 2018**

1) Big Sunflower River, MS

Threat – Army Corps pumping project

At Risk – Critical wetlands and wildlife habitat

2) Rivers of Bristol Bay, AK

Threat – Mining

At risk – Clean water, salmon runs, indigenous cultur

3) Boundary Waters, MN

Threat – Mining

At risk – Clean water, recreation economy

4) Lower Rio Grande, TX

Threat – Border wall

At risk – River access, public safety, wildlife habitat

5) South Fork Salmon River, ID

Threat – Mining

At risk – Clean water, salmon habitat

6) Mississippi River Gorge, MN

Threat – Dams

At risk – Habitat, recreation opportunities

7) Smith River, MT

Threat – Mining

At risk – Clean water, recreation

8) Colville River, AK

Threat – Oil and gas development

At risk – Clean water, wildlife

9) Middle Fork Vermilion River, IL

Threat – Coal ash pollution

At risk – Clean water, Wild and Scenic River values

10) KinnickinnicRiver,WI

Threat – Dams

At risk – Blue-ribbon trout stream

## **About American Rivers**

American Rivers protects wild rivers, restores damaged rivers, and conserves clean water for people and nature. Since 1973, American Rivers has protected and restored more than 150,000 miles of rivers through advocacy efforts, on-the-ground projects, and an annual America's Most Endangered Rivers®

campaign. Headquartered in Washington, D.C., American Rivers has offices across the country and more than 275,000 members, supporters, and volunteers.

Rivers connect us to each other, nature, and future generations. Find your connections at [AmericanRivers.org](http://AmericanRivers.org), [Facebook.com/AmericanRivers](https://www.facebook.com/AmericanRivers), and [Twitter.com/AmericanRivers](https://twitter.com/AmericanRivers).

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