



Boundary Waters named among America's Most Endangered Rivers

Copper mining threatens clean water, local economy, cultural values

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Washington, D.C. – American Rivers today named the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness among *America's Most Endangered Rivers*® of 2021, citing the grave threat proposed copper mining poses to clean water and America's most popular wilderness. American Rivers and its partners called on the Biden administration to permanently protect the Boundary Waters from sulfide-ore copper mining by issuing a federal mineral withdrawal, and urged Congress to pass legislation to forever protect this national treasure.

"The America's Most Endangered Rivers report is a call to action to save rivers facing urgent decisions," said Jessie Thomas-Blate with American Rivers. "Sulfide-ore copper mining pollution poses an unacceptable risk to the clean rivers, streams and lakes of the Boundary Waters, and this is the year we must finally stop these mining proposals once and for all."

"The Boundary Waters is America's most popular Wilderness, a vibrant and fragile ecosystem, and a cornerstone of a local economy that sustains thousands of livelihoods," said Tom Landwehr, Executive Director of the Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters. "It needs to be permanently protected from the threat of sulfide-ore copper mining."

The Boundary Waters and the Kawishiwi River are threatened by a massive sulfide-ore copper mine proposed on the South Kawishiwi River and Birch Lake, which flow into the Boundary Waters. Hardrock mining poses an unacceptable risk to the region's clean water, economy and cultural values. Acid mine drainage harms water, aquatic and terrestrial species, forests and soils, and poses a serious risk to human health by, among other things, increasing mercury in fish. Studies show that sulfide-ore copper mining along lakes and streams that flow into the Boundary Waters would put at risk not only premier fishing, hunting and other recreation on Superior National Forest lands, but also the sustainable economy of northeastern Minnesota. An independent peer-reviewed economic study by Harvard Professor James Stock demonstrated that a ban on copper mining in the Boundary Waters watershed would result in more jobs and more income for the region.

Voyageur Outward Bound School's base is on the Kawishiwi River, right next to proposed mining sites. "Voyageur Outward Bound School's mission is critically tied to the health of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. Since 1964, the Boundary Waters has been our classroom and where we serve our students. Any pollution that could threaten these waterways or land threaten our mission to change lives by using the Wilderness to provide unparalleled

opportunities for personal growth, self-reliance, confidence, teamwork and compassion," said Jack Lee of Voyageur Outward Bound School.

Anishinaabe people (including the Ojibwe or Chippewa) have a deep traditional and cultural relationship to these lands and waters. They harvest wild rice in the Boundary Waters region, maintain treaty rights to hunt, fish and gather on these lands, and have called for the protection of this important landscape. In 2016, three bands of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe (Fond du Lac, Grand Portage and White Earth) and one Canadian First Nation (Lac La Croix) requested that the U.S. federal government ban sulfide-ore copper mining on federal public lands. In 2020, the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe, consisting of six bands, stated its support for legislation introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by Congresswoman Betty McCollum that would ban sulfide-ore copper mining on federal lands in the Boundary Waters watershed, part of the 1854 Ceded Territory.

"The nation's most polluting industry is seeking to build sulfide-ore copper mines at the doorstep of the nation's most visited Wilderness Area," said Amanda John Kimsey, Campaign Manager with The Wilderness Society. "The consequences of building this type of toxic mining on the edge of the Boundary Waters would have cascading effects on regional tourism, recreation and hospitality industries, endanger beloved wildlife, and cause irreparable damage to lands and waters where Anishinaabe people retain fishing, hunting and gathering rights. This is the wrong place for the wrong mine. Pollution from sulfide-ore copper mining is nearly impossible to contain and can last for hundreds, sometimes thousands of years. This report rightfully acknowledges the urgent threat facing the Boundary Waters and should reaffirm to Congress that it's time to pass legislation that permanently protects the Boundary Waters watershed."

American Rivers and its partners called on the Biden administration to re-initiate the process for a 20-year federal ban on sulfide-ore copper mining on public lands in the Boundary Waters watershed, starting with a two-year pause on mineral leasing and robust study on the risks of mining in this unique and treasured place. American Rivers also urged Congress to pass Representative Betty McCollum's *Boundary Waters Wilderness Protection and Pollution Prevention Act* which would permanently ban sulfide-ore copper mining on Superior National Forest lands in the watershed of the Boundary Waters. This bill was passed by the U.S. House of Representatives Natural Resources Committee in September 2020 and is expected to be reintroduced soon in the 117th Congress.

"The Boundary Waters is an incredible resource for outdoor recreationists and one of the most stupendous locations for flatwater paddling in the country," said Tania Lown-Hecht, Outdoor Alliance Communications Director. "The landscape draws visitors from across the country and supports a resilient outdoor recreation economy that has been increasingly important over the past year. The proposed mining and the history of mining-related pollution put the Boundary Waters at enormous risk. We hope elected officials move to permanently protect the region by withdrawing the watershed from proposed mining, preserving this special landscape and all the benefits it provides to local communities."

"The Boundary Water offers a wild and pristine paddling experience in the continental United States that is second to none," said Brett Mayer with American Canoe Association. "There are more than one thousand lakes of varying size and 1,200 miles of canoeing routes that stitch together a patchwork of backcountry campsites and offer an opportunity for truly profound paddling experiences. There is also an incredible concentration of canoe and kayaking outfitters offering instructional experiences for paddlers of all skill levels to progress. Pollution from sulfide mining risks irreparably damaging a hallowed landscape in the world of paddling and it has been

our longstanding hope that elected officials move to permanently ban sulfide-ore copper mining in the watersheds of the Boundary Waters."

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 more than 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, black bear, lynx, bald eagles, loons, wolves, walleye, lake trout 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. This, in turn, has created vibrant, wilderness-edge communities that thrive in a clean environment but will be devastated with the opening of a mine.

Explorers Amy and Dave Freeman, who work as wilderness canoe and dogsled guides, spent a whole year travelling through the Boundary Waters to bear witness to its beauty and inspire others to work to protect it. "There is a primal enchantment aroused when you wake to a blanket of mist covering your temporary home deep in the Boundary Waters. We make pilgrimages to wild places; we have to slow down, unplug, and just be. This is the real world -- wild and free. The border encircling the Boundary Waters Wilderness is an imaginary line drawn on a map. In this instance the water flows out of the wilderness and eventually back in. How would this water change if it flowed past an industrial mining zone? How would the character of our nation's most popular wilderness area change if it was located downstream of our nation's most toxic industry?" The Freemans wrote a book about the experience: *A Year in the Wilderness* (Milkweed Editions).

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 included on the list in 2018 and 2013 for this same mining issue. Other rivers in the region listed as most endangered in recent years include the Menominee River (2020), Upper Mississippi River (2019), and Big Darby Creek (2019).

AMERICA'S MOST ENDANGERED RIVERS® OF 2021

#1: Snake River (ID, WA, OR)

Threat: Four federal dams on the lower Snake River

#2: Lower Missouri River (MO, IA, NE, KS)

Threat: Outdated river management

#3: Boundary Waters (MN)

Threat: Sulfide-ore copper mining

#4: South River (GA)

Threat: Pollution due to lax enforcement

#5: Pecos River (NM)

Threat: Pollution from proposed hardrock mining

#6: Tar Creek (OK)

Threat: Pollution from Tar Creek Superfund Site

#7: McCloud River (CA)

Threat: Raising of Shasta Dam

#8: Ipswich River (MA)

Threat: Excessive water withdrawals

#9: Raccoon River (IA)

Threat: Pollution from industrial agriculture and factory farming

#10: Turkey Creek (MS)

Threat: Two major developments