

For Immediate Release

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SAVE THE BOUNDARY WATERS

ICYMI:

[Boundary Waters in even greater danger after new Executive Order waiving environmental reviews to expedite risky projects](#)

New order just the latest in a long line of attacks on our nation's environmental laws designed to protect clean air and water

Last week President Trump signed a sweeping [Executive Order](#) seeking to exploit the coronavirus crisis to circumvent public input and responsible review of the environmental and public health impacts of federal projects under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). The Order allows agencies to bypass current laws requiring critical input from the public and environmental review and could hasten dangerous projects, such as Antofagasta's Twin Metals mine adjacent to the Boundary Waters, toward completion without the necessary vetting.

“This Executive Order is another appalling attack on government transparency and accountability, and could significantly impact the environmental review process for dangerous sulfide-ore copper mining near the Boundary Waters,” said Becky Rom, National Chair of the Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters. **“The use of a national emergency declaration to grant favors to extractive industries by forcing through risky projects is yet another example of the current Administration’s disdain for protecting America’s outstanding natural places.”**

NEPA is one of America’s bedrock environmental laws. It requires federal agencies to assess the environmental effects of their proposed actions prior to making decisions. The range of actions covered by NEPA is broad and includes:

- making decisions on permit applications,

- adopting federal land management actions,
- reviewing environmental impacts of proposed hardrock mines, especially in sensitive areas, and
- constructing highways and other publicly-owned facilities.

Using the NEPA process, agencies evaluate the environmental and related social and economic effects of their proposed actions. Agencies also provide opportunities for public review and comment on those evaluations.

This Executive Order is just the latest attack on our environmental laws that significantly heightens the risk for the Boundary Waters and surrounding communities. Earlier last week the Trump Administration finalized a rule [undermining the Clean Water Act](#) by blocking state and tribal governments' ability to protect their own natural resources. Recently the Minnesota Star Tribune covered how these changes impact the Boundary Waters.

The Star Tribune [reported](#) that:

The changes come at a critical time for Minnesota with one of the most controversial mine projects in the state's history entering the regulatory review process. The huge sulfide ore copper-nickel mine that Chilean mining giant Antofagasta and its Twin Metals subsidiary want to build just outside the Boundary Waters will dig up 20,000 tons of ore per day.

The project could require an EPA Section 401 water quality certification if it's determined that the mine could damage water quality in the Boundary Waters, where even motorized fishing boats aren't allowed.

The Boundary Waters area enjoys special protections in Minnesota, which deems it an "outstanding resource value water" in state law.

Katrina Kessler, assistant commissioner of the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA), called the proposed Section 401 changes "a big concern for Minnesota."

Kessler sent the EPA a comment letter last October after the agency first proposed the changes, saying the proposed rule "would leave us unable to address the potential water quality concerns in or near the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness."

In an interview, Kessler said that Minnesota's stricter standards would be overruled and the state "would only be directed to protect to a very low bar."

Since taking office in 2017 the Trump Administration has systematically shredded protections for the Boundary Waters, America's most popular Wilderness. From arbitrarily reinstating dangerous mineral leases to canceling studies on the impact of sulfide ore mining on the Boundary Waters Wilderness to now changing the rules to make it easier for mining companies to pollute and harder for states to regulate, this Administration is doing everything it can to pave the way for this toxic project to move forward.

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