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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

December 20, 2018

**Scandal-plagued Interior Department to unlawfully renew leases for toxic mining next to Minnesota's Boundary Waters Wilderness**

*Attempted end-run around the environmental review process puts America's most popular Wilderness at risk*

**ELY, MN**— Today Donald Trump's scandal-plagued Department of the Interior (DOI) announced it will unlawfully renew two leases for toxic mining next to America's most popular Wilderness in an attempted end-run around the environmental review process. The leases were terminated in 2016 when, after years of study and overwhelming public comment, the U.S. Forest Service concluded that copper mining under these leases posed an unacceptable risk of irreparable damage to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (Boundary Waters) and to surrounding Superior National Forest lands and waters. The leases will go to Chilean mining conglomerate Antofagasta's Twin Metals. Today's decision bypasses the US Forest Service's earlier objection.

"The Trump Administration's unlawful renewal of toxic mining leases next to the Boundary Waters goes against good science, obvious facts, and basic common sense," said Becky Rom, National Chair of the Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters. "It also goes against the will of Minnesotans, 70% of whom oppose this dangerous mining near the Wilderness. The Trump administration is trying to do an end run around the environmental review process and ram through federal approvals while they still can."

The leases were temporarily reinstated in May 2018 based on a specious legal opinion by Koch Brothers strategist Daniel Jorjani, who has been impermissibly acting as the top lawyer for DOI the past two years, despite never undergoing the required confirmation by the US Senate. The same suspect opinion paved the way for today's renewal announcement and is being challenged in court.

The Interior Department is proposing to renew these terminated leases after only a narrow review and limited opportunity for the public to raise concerns of negative environmental, economic, and social impacts of copper mining on the Wilderness and nearby lands, waters, and communities.

This follows on the heels of the Trump Administration's 11<sup>th</sup> hour cancellation of a two-year study intended to determine the benefits of a 20-year mining ban on lands near the Boundary Waters. The ban was requested by the U.S. Forest Service as necessary to protect the Wilderness from the risks posed by sulfide-ore mining. Over 94% of the 125,000 public comments urged protection.

The Trump administration has refused to make public the underlying ecological, public health, and economic reports prepared during the study.

## FIVE THINGS TO KNOW

**1. Trump's scandal-plagued Department of Interior is doing an end-run around the environmental review process to ram through mineral leases for a Chilean mining boss who is also Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump's landlord.** Since assuming power in 2017 the Trump Administration has been ignoring science, facts, and the will of the people by systematically unwinding protections for the Boundary Waters at the behest of Antofagasta. Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke resigned this weekend amid more than a dozen investigations into his conduct, including his ties to a Haliburton-backed land deal in Montana and doing favors for lobbyists. Under Zinke Interior has been a cesspool of conflicts of interest and industry lobbyist access.

**2. Antofagasta has a history of environmental disaster and political corruption in its homeland.** Antofagasta was found guilty by the Chilean Supreme Court of harming residents of a community when Antofagasta located its tailings dam upstream, polluting the groundwater and blocking a critical source of water on which the community depended. They were responsible for the highest number of toxic spills in the region of Coquimbo, including one spill which dumped 13,000 liters of copper concentrate directly into a river. They faced a fine of \$23.8 million and closure of its biggest copper mine in Chile over violations of its environmental permit, including water pollution.

Antofagasta has been implicated in a number of bribery and corruption scandals, including with a high-ranking Chilean cabinet minister, a questionable \$10 million dollar loan to the daughter-in-law of the Chilean president, and tax fraud.

**3. The Trump Administration is suppressing important scientific information about the danger sulfide-ore copper mining poses to the Boundary Waters.** The US Department of Agriculture abruptly cancelled a two year study on the impacts of copper mining on lands and communities near the Boundary Waters. The study would have shown the harm sulfide-ore copper mining would have done. The Trump administration has refused to make public the underlying ecological, public health, and economic reports prepared during the study. According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Toxics Release Inventory, metal mining is the nation's #1 toxic polluter, and a wide body of rigorous scientific literature shows the near inevitability of pollution flowing into and severely damaging the Boundary Waters.

**4. Protecting the Boundary Waters is the smart economic choice.** The BWCA 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 economic activity every year and over 17,000 jobs. A recent independent study from Harvard University showed that protecting the Boundary Waters from the Twin Metals mine would result in dramatically more jobs and income over a 20 year period.

**5. A vast majority of Minnesotans and Americans want the Boundary Waters protected from the threat of sulfide-ore copper mining.** Seventy percent of Minnesotans oppose sulfide-ore copper mining near the Boundary Waters, and over 94% of the 125,000 public comments on the proposed mining ban urged protection. Nearly 56,000 citizens submitted additional comments during a second comment period.

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