



Feb. 5, 2020

**Land Tawney  
President and CEO  
Backcountry Hunters & Anglers**

**House Natural Resources Subcommittee on Energy and Natural Resources**

**Legislative Hearing on H.R. 5598 (Rep. Betty McCollum), "Boundary Waters Wilderness Protection and Pollution Prevention Act"**

Chairman Lowenthal, Ranking Member Gosar and members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H.R. 5598, the Boundary Waters Wilderness Protection and Pollution Prevention Act. My name is Land Tawney. I'm the president and CEO of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers. We thank Rep. McCollum, Rep. Rooney and the bipartisan list of original cosponsors supporting the bill. We also thank the subcommittee for holding this hearing to consider testimony on H.R. 5598 to permanently protect public lands in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness watershed from copper-nickel mining development.

BHA is a North American conservation organization with 40,000-plus members and chapters in 45 states, two provinces and one territory. Our Minnesota chapter is 1,620 members strong and won our chapter of the year award in 2018. We work to ensure access to public lands and waters and the healthy populations of fish and wildlife so important to our outdoor traditions. We combine sage wisdom with youthful exuberance to accomplish work on the ground, at state and provincial legislatures and, today, in Washington, D.C.

I hope that all of you have had the opportunity to sit around a campfire late at night. These simple moments connect us to the generations that came before us. BHA bestows an annual award named in honor of Sigurd Olson, the renowned conservationist who found his solace and inspiration in the very landscape we are talking about today. In his words,

*"In years of roaming the wilds, my campfires seem like glowing beads in a long chain of experience. Some of the beads glow more than the others, and when I blow on them ever so softly, they burst into flame. When that happens, I recapture the scenes themselves, pick them out of the almost forgotten limbo of the past and make them live."*

In today's fast paced world of almost constant digital connection, those places that provide solace, adventure and challenge are even more coveted. Olson knew this as well:

*"Wilderness to the people of America is a spiritual necessity, an antidote to the high pressure of modern life, a means of regaining serenity and equilibrium."*



We aren't making any new blank spots on the map. It's our responsibility to help protect this unmatched landscape for future generations.

President Theodore Roosevelt set aside the Superior National Forest in 1909. President Lyndon Johnson enacted the Wilderness Act of 1964. President Jimmy Carter signed into law the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Act of 1978. At every turn, decision-makers protected the Boundary Waters and its diversity of fish and wildlife. It is our generation's duty to uphold this commitment and our outdoor heritage. Passage of this bipartisan bill would advance that legacy.

This is the reason I am here today representing hunters and anglers. We are united in our support of permanently protecting 234,328 acres of public land in the watershed of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness from copper-nickel mining development. The Boundary Waters is America's most-visited wilderness area and lies within the Superior National Forest, which contains 20 percent of the freshwater in the entire National Forest System. Perhaps nowhere else in the country better represents the idea that some public lands and waters are too important to risk.

[National conservation groups](#) wholeheartedly support this legislation, including Sportsmen for the Boundary Waters, National Wildlife Federation, Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership, American Sportfishing Association, Quality Deer Management Association, Ruffed Grouse Society, American Woodcock Society, American Fly Fishing Trade Association, Fly Fishers International, National Deer Alliance, the Izaak Walton League of America and Trout Unlimited. Individually, these groups are dedicated to the conservation of species, habitat and access to wild places for hunters and anglers. Together, we understand the importance of the Boundary Waters to the American wilderness system. The conservation of the fish, wildlife and water quality in the Boundary Waters and across the region are paramount to our collective efforts to protect lands and waters open to any person willing to portage, paddle or hike in and out of the wilderness. That wilderness must remain accessible and intact or all Americans will pay the price.

We know that lack of access is cited by sportsmen and women as the No. 1 reason why we stop pursuing hunting and fishing. During a trip I took into the Boundary Waters this fall, outfitted by a local business, Piragis Northwoods Company, owned by one of our members, I hunted grouse, ducks and squirrel and fished for bass, pike and walleye – all in a single day. I drank clean, fresh water directly from the South Kawishiwi River, where the proposed copper-nickel mine would be built, and ate freshly harvested meat over a campfire that night. The Boundary Waters provides a rare backcountry experience where all of this is possible – few other places across the United States afford hunters and anglers the access and opportunity to hunt, fish and explore a true wilderness landscape. Better yet, the ease of a canoe and moderate portages create opportunities for visitors young and old.

The Boundary Waters, along with Voyageurs National Park, are home to almost half of Minnesota's native fish species. The thousands of lakes and over 1,300 miles of coldwater streams within the BWCAW shelter important habitat for native fish, such as lake trout. Lakes in Minnesota contain the second largest lake trout population in the country, second only to Alaska. Any contamination of the South Kawishiwi River and the surrounding area jeopardizes not only the cold, clean water for which the area is known but also ongoing efforts to conserve species iconic to the region.



[Evidence from previous hard rock mines](#) demonstrates overwhelmingly that a copper-nickel mine in the Boundary Waters watershed will impact fish and that such damage is likely to extend far from the mine site and persist for centuries. This would irreparably diminish world-class fisheries that bring anglers to the region from across the country.

Studies also show a [high likelihood of forest fragmentation](#) (the separation of forest from roads and mining development), disrupting wildlife migration and habitat use. The BWCAW is mostly made up of forest on thin soils and granite bedrock, giving the landscape a high-level of interconnection between aquatic and terrestrial components of the ecosystem outside of the Boundary Waters. Due to this, acid mine drainage (or AMD), a byproduct of copper-nickel mining, would impact lowland forest and surrounding rivers, creeks and wetlands. This area is important habitat for ruffed grouse, white-tailed deer, black bear, moose, migratory birds, and an array of Boreal Forest species. Damage to this habitat is guaranteed, and remediation from damage related to acid mine drainage would be impossible given the interconnectedness of ground and surface water and the remote nature of the wilderness.

This habitat is one reason why the Boundary Waters is the most-visited wilderness in America: its clean water and accessible public lands bring hunters, anglers and other recreationists from across the country. In 2017, 73 million people visited Minnesota from out of state, highlighting not only the popularity of the state's natural beauty but also the ongoing contribution to the economy from tourism and outdoor recreation. Outdoor businesses, including First Lite, RepYourWater, New Belgium Brewing Company, Hunt To Eat, Scott Fly Rod Company, Patagonia and others, strongly support H.R. 5598 for this reason. [Explore MN, Minnesota's tourism bureau, found](#) that without the benefit of tourism in Minnesota, each household in the state would owe \$625 more in taxes, each and every year.

The [Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation](#) found that Minnesota ranks 7th nationally in economic contributions of hunters, who spend \$3.17 billion annually to support 47,901 jobs across the state directly related to hunting and fishing. Although the Boundary Waters is in the northeastern corner of Minnesota, businesses from across the state feel the benefit. From Wenonah Canoe in Winona, Minnesota and fly shops in Minneapolis and St. Paul to outfitters and guides like Backcountry Hunters & Anglers members Jason Zabokrtsky and Paul Schurke in northern Minnesota, these businesses are connected to the BWCAW. Fishing alone supports [26,794 jobs](#) in Minnesota according to an American Sportfishing Association study, and last year over 1.85 million anglers spent \$2.6 billion in the state. The foundation of this industry is Minnesota's clean water.

All these businesses have existed together, with iron and taconite mining, as well as steel production throughout Minnesota's history. Mining is important to the state. Not a single person on this panel wants fewer jobs for people in northeastern Minnesota. Moreover, this bill only affects proposed copper-nickel mining and won't affect existing mining in the area.

Minnesota's Iron Range has a rich history of iron mining – not copper-nickel mining. BHA has not advocated against iron mining in Minnesota. We advocate for resource development in areas that have low impacts to fish and wildlife habitat and contribute to a robust economy. Extracting copper



upstream of the Boundary Waters is irresponsible, negatively impacts fish and wildlife habitat and threatens Minnesota's booming \$16.7 billion outdoor recreation economy.

A report by [Harvard economist Jim Stock](#) found that protecting the Boundary Waters would lead to more economic growth in the region than copper-nickel mining. The numbers show that an increase in temporary 20-year employment from copper mining in the region (270-600 jobs) would eliminate 4,400-6,600 of the existing 12,642 jobs in tourism and recreation. The tourism and recreation industry depend on clean water to thrive and continue to boost the local economy in a sustainable way.

We know the wildlife management problems that exist because of copper-nickel mining and water pollution. Look no further than the Berkeley Pit in my home state of Montana. Designated a Superfund site in 1987, the former open-pit copper mine has since filled with water, oxidizing sulfide-ore and releasing heavy metals directly into our water. Thankfully, the water is contained in a deep pit, but this hasn't stopped damage to wildlife. In 2016, [thousands of snow geese died](#) after landing in the pit during a storm. Scientists and wildlife biologists concluded that the snow geese were killed by exposure to sulfuric acid and heavy metals from the concentration in the mine pit.

As a wilderness advocate, Sigurd Olson knew wilderness would never be a guarantee, and that others would need to reaffirm the exact protections he fought for here. In his book, *Open Horizons*, he said, *"The world needs metals and men need work, but they also must have wilderness and beauty, and in the years to come will need it even more. I thought of the broad, beautiful America we had found and our dream of freedom and opportunity and wondered. Could man in his new civilization afford to lose again and again to progress? Did we have the right to deprive future generations of what we have known? What would the future bring?"*

It is our collective obligation to ensure these opportunities are carried forward across America today. In Montana, this beauty is apparent in public lands that we've protected the same way. We are simply asking for the same protections Paradise Valley, the gateway to the Yellowstone National Park, and Methow Valley in Washington received last year from the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act. This bill does nothing to stop existing mining. It protects existing jobs in the outdoor recreation economy and sets forth ground rules by which future mining, logging, and wilderness travel can coexist. This was President Theodore Roosevelt's vision from the beginning, and we urge decision makers to carry on this legacy for future generations.

During my trip this fall our party visited public lands a stone's throw from the proposed mine site. As we rounded the final corner in our boat a flock of geese and later two dozen mallard ducks erupted from the flat of wild rice. Today, I speak on behalf of those fowl, fish and wildlife that cannot.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. We appreciate the leadership of Reps. McCollum and Rooney on permanently protecting public lands in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness watershed. Thank you Chairman Lowenthal and Ranking Member Gosar for holding this hearing.



We look forward to working with you all to advance the Boundary Waters Wilderness Protection and Pollution Prevention Act.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Land Tawney". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first letter of each name being significantly larger and more stylized.

Land Tawney  
President and CEO  
Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

