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Secretary Jewell cites Minnesota's iconic Boundary Waters Wilderness in major speech as "special area" deserving reexamination

Today Department of Interior Secretary Sally Jewell cited Minnesota's iconic Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, as an example of a "special area" that should be reexamined through modern science that "better understand[s] the value of the land and water and potential impacts of development." The Secretary said she plans on making progress on it this year.

The mention comes in a [major speech](#) outlining the Obama Administration's approach to conservation and the need for a course correction in order to ensure healthy lands, water and wildlife for the next century of American conservation. The Boundary Waters Wilderness was included along with places such as Badger Two Medicine in Montana and the Roan Plateau in Colorado.

"The vision for our public lands over the next 100 years expressed today by Secretary Jewell is a powerful reflection of the fundamental ideals of community and inclusivity at the heart of our democracy," said Becky Rom, national chair of the Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters. "Her recognition of the need for modern scientific evaluation of potential threats, such as sulfide-ore copper mining, to iconic places like the Boundary Waters Wilderness is critical to guaranteeing we fulfill our obligation to protect the natural wonders entrusted to our care for generations to come."

The Boundary Waters Wilderness in northern Minnesota is a spectacular landscape of lakes, streams, woods and wildlife covering 1.1 million acres along the Canadian border. It is the most heavily-visited Wilderness Area in the United States, attracting 250,000 visitors annually from all over the world.

The wilderness is currently threatened by proposed sulfide-ore copper mining by Twin Metals, owned by South American mining giant Antofagasta, which proposes to mine sulfide-ore copper on lands next to the Boundary Waters Wilderness and along rivers and lakes that flow directly into the Wilderness. This kind of metal mining is known as "[America's most toxic industry](#)." Preliminary drilling has occurred within one-quarter mile of the Wilderness boundary.

A study published recently in the [*Journal of Hydrology*](#) shows that pollution from the proposed Twin Metals Minnesota mine sites would flow into the Boundary Waters Wilderness even under the ordinary course of mining operations. The peer-reviewed study concludes that contamination from the mine sites could significantly damage the Boundary Waters Wilderness. Fifty-three leading scientists in ecology and natural resource-based disciplines also signed a [letter](#) expressing deep concern over the proposed mine sites.

Mineral leases held by Twin Metals were issued in 1966, before any environmental regulations existed, including the Clean Water Act, the Clean Air Act, and the law that requires environmental impacts to be considered before decisions are made where mines can be sited. These leases have never undergone environmental review.

If issued today (or even after 1970, when the National Environmental Policy Act went into effect), they would have undergone environmental review. Last month the U.S. Bureau of Land Management [announced](#) it has the legal authority to deny the renewal of the expired sulfide-ore mining leases held by Twin Metals.

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