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Citing risk to Wilderness US Forest Service Considering Not Consenting to Renewal of Sulfide-Ore Mining Leases Threatening Minnesota's Boundary Waters

Today, the US Forest Service (USFS) [announced](#) it was considering protecting Minnesota's Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness from the threat of sulfide-ore copper mining by withholding consent to the renewal of two mineral leases. The leases, held by Twin Metals Minnesota, which is owned by the Chilean mining giant Antofagasta, expired on Dec. 31, 2013, and are up for renewal.

"The Boundary Waters Wilderness is a one-of-a-kind natural wonder and key driver of the economy of Northern Minnesota," said Becky Rom, National Chair for the Campaign to Save the Boundary the Waters. "In recognizing the incredible value of the Wilderness and the dangers posed by sulfide-ore copper mining, the Forest Service's announcement is an important acknowledgement about the need to protect the Boundary Waters."

In the announcement, the USFS said that as it considers withholding consent the leases it would allow for public input before any final decision is made. An open house will be held on July 13 at the Duluth Entertainment Convention Center in Duluth Minnesota.

While the US Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is the holder of the Twin Metals leases, because the land in question is in the Superior National Forest, the USFS has a right of consent to any lease renewal. In a letter sent last Monday, the BLM asked the USFS whether it would grant or withhold consent for renewal of the leases.

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.

In addition to denying the leases the Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters is also urging the US Forest Service to ask Interior Secretary Sally Jewell to withdraw the federally-owned minerals within the Boundary Waters watershed from the federal mineral leasing program. This would protect the Boundary Waters from sulfide-ore copper mining for twenty years.

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The Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters is a broad coalition of more than 30 partner organizations, including conservation, sportsmen, and veteran's groups. The Campaign is also supported by more than 100 local and national businesses. The Campaign is led by Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness, which is based in Ely, Minnesota. For more information visit: SavetheBoundaryWaters.org