

*Wildlife and Hunting Heritage  
Conservation Council*

---

November 6, 2015

The Honorable Sally Jewell  
Secretary of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington D.C. 20240

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Dear Secretary Jewell and Secretary Vilsack:

The members of the Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council (Council) are concerned about the impacts of pollution from mining operations on fish and wildlife species and the hunting and fishing experiences of sportsmen and women. As we saw from the recent spill on the Animas River, where years of leaking heavy metals and toxics from various mines had already killed many aquatic species, the potential damage to water resources and wildlife is substantial. In the coming months, the Council will discuss how sportsmen and women are affected by the challenges with the current system including the inadequacies of the 1872 mining law, the half million abandoned mines, the insufficient resources for mine remediation (no financial assurance, trust fund, etc.), and the patchwork of state programs. We plan to provide an update to you both following these discussions.

At the same time, the Council is also concerned about the potential implications on sportsmen and wildlife from several proposed hard rock mines located near extremely important wildlife habitat and recreational areas. For example, the Council previously sent a letter dated July 20, 2012 on the proposed Pebble Mine near Bristol Bay in Alaska. We believe it is imperative that impacts to fish and wildlife habitats and sportsmen be fully considered during the evaluation of these proposals.

Today, we write to express our concerns about proposed sulfide-ore copper mining operations in the headwaters flowing into the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, which is located within Superior National Forest. Boundary Waters is a national treasure for sportsmen and outdoor enthusiasts - and serves as an economic engine for the communities in northeastern Minnesota. It is America's most visited Wilderness Area, primarily because of the pristine habitat that supports a wide diversity of wildlife, including moose, bear, wolves, deer, grouse, loons, osprey, eagles, walleye and pike, and outdoor experiences from hunting and fishing to canoeing and camping. Tourism in this region supports thousands of jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars of economic activity annually.

Our request for your attention to this project stems for our concern that the proposed sulfide-ore copper mining operation, which produces byproducts of sulfuric acid and

---

CHAIRMAN

**John Tomke**  
Ducks Unlimited

VICE CHAIRMAN

**Christine Thomas**  
University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point

MEMBERS

**Jeffrey S. Crane**  
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation

**Whit Fosburgh**

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation  
Partnership

**Wayne Hubbard**

Urban American Outdoors

**Winifred B Kessler**

The Wildlife Society

**Robert Manes**

The Nature Conservancy

**Baasewe Frederick D. Maulson**

Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife  
Commission

**Robert Model**

Boone and Crockett Club

**Miles Moretti**

Mule Deer Foundation

**Collin O'Mara**

National Wildlife Federation

**Joanna Prukop**

(former) New Mexico Secretary of  
Energy, Minerals & Natural Resources

**Stephen L. Sanetti**

National Shooting Sports Foundation

**Land Tawney**

Backcountry Hunters & Anglers

**George C. Thornton**

National Wild Turkey Federation

**Howard K. Vincent**

Pheasants Forever

**Larry Voyles**

Arizona Game and Fish Department

**Steve Williams**

Wildlife Management Institute

EX OFFICIO REPRESENTATION

*Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies  
Bureau of Land Management  
National Park Service  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
Farm Service Agency  
U.S. Forest Service  
Natural Resources Conservation Service*

DESIGNATED FEDERAL OFFICER &  
COORDINATOR

**Joshua Winchell**

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
National Wildlife Refuge System  
5275 Leesburg Pike  
Falls Church, VA 22041-3803  
703 358-2639

---

heavy metals, has the potential to forever alter the unspoiled wildlife habitat and water quality of the Rainy River Watershed, which hosts Boundary Waters. This concern is grounded in the fact that similar sulfide-ore mines in the United States have repeatedly discharged pollution into adjacent waters or lands. The consequences of even a minimal spill into Boundary Waters would change the acidity of the waters, which would affect the entire ecosystem for aquatic species, and a more substantial spill could decimate important habitat and outdoor experiences. We understand and respect the review process associated with mineral withdrawals and we encourage close coordination between the Department of Interior (the Bureau of Land Management has responsibility for federal minerals management) and the Department of Agriculture (the U.S. Forest Service manages Superior National Forest within which Boundary Waters resides).

Sulfide-ore copper mining in the watershed of Boundary Waters could affect wildlife conservation efforts and the quality of hunting opportunities throughout this remarkable region. For all these reasons, we strongly urge your Departments' vigilance to conserve the habitat of Boundary Waters for the benefit for wildlife and sportsmen for generations to come.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John Tomke". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

John Tomke, Chair  
Wildlife and Hunting Heritage Conservation Council