

May 20, 2019

The Honorable David Bernhardt
Secretary of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington D.C. 20240

Joseph Balash
Assistant Secretary of the Interior,
Lands and Minerals Management
1849 C Street NW
Washington D.C. 20240

The Honorable Sonny Perdue
Secretary of Agriculture
1400 Independence Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20250

Vicki Christiansen
Chief, U.S. Forest Service
201 14th St SW
Washington, D.C. 20227



Dear Secretary Bernhardt, Assistant Secretary Balash, Secretary Perdue and Chief Christiansen:

We, the undersigned conservation, hunting and fishing organizations, write to express our concerns about the proposed sulfide-ore copper mining operation in the headwaters of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW), located within Superior National Forest.

The Boundary Waters is a world-class fishing and hunting destination, and used by thousands of outdoor enthusiasts each year, who contribute to a recreation-based economy crucial to Northeastern Minnesota. The BWCAW is America's most visited Wilderness Area, and the backdrop for iconic outdoor experiences for over 150,000 annual visitors that use camps, lodges, restaurants and hotels in Northeastern Minnesota. 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 heavy metals, has the potential to forever alter the unspoiled wildlife habitat and water quality of the Rainy River Watershed, the home of the Boundary Waters. 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, affecting habitat for iconic fish and wildlife, such as lake trout, smallmouth bass, walleye and moose. A more substantial spill could affect this habitat significantly and limit opportunities to hunt and fish in and around the Wilderness.

The U.S. Forest Service, in consultation with the Bureau of Land Management, was 20 months into a 24-month process to complete a mineral lease withdrawal study reviewing the effects of proposed sulfide-ore copper mining in the watershed of the Boundary Waters when that study was cancelled in September, 2018. Despite commitments from your agencies to complete that study and base your decisions on its results, the leases in question were renewed by the Bureau of Land Management and the scientific research and public outreach the USFS conducted were not a part of your decision making process. The cancellation of the withdrawal study is concerning, and should be reversed.

Sulfide-ore copper mining in the watershed of Boundary Waters would have detrimental effects on fish and wildlife conservation efforts and the quality of fishing and hunting opportunities for future generations throughout this irreplaceable region. We urge your departments to:

- Reinstatement of your commitment to completing a mineral withdrawal study to better understand the impacts of this mining proposal to the Boundary Waters and Superior National Forest;
- Make the findings of a mineral withdrawal study available to the public;
- Base decisions about the renewal or withdrawal of the leases in question on sound science conducted through the study;
- Base all further decisions concerning this proposal on science-based land and wildlife management principles, as well as the economics of a mine development in this sensitive area as compared to the current and future tourism- and recreation-based economies of the Boundary Waters and Superior National Forest.

Thank you for reviewing our requests. We encourage you to address our concerns about the proposed sulfide-ore copper mining operations in the headwaters of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, America's most visited and iconic Wilderness.

Sincerely,

Bob St. Pierre
National Board Chair
Sportsmen for the Boundary Waters
Ely, MN

Lukas Leaf
Executive Director
Sportsmen for the Boundary Waters
Ely, MN

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership

Backcountry Hunters and Anglers

Bass Anglers Sportsman Society (B.A.S.S)

Ruffed Grouse Society

National Wildlife Federation

Pheasants Forever

Quail Forever

Fly Fishers International

American Sportfishing Association

American Fly Fishing Trade Association

Angler Action Foundation

Property and Environment Research Center

Quality Deer Management Association

National Deer Alliance

North American Falconers Association (NAFA)

Pope and Young Club

Keep it Public