

May 5, 2025

The Honorable Bruce Westerman
Chairman
United States House Committee on
Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jared Huffman
Ranking Member
United States House Committee on
Natural Resources
1324 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Westerman and Ranking Member Huffman:

On behalf of our millions of members and supporters, the undersigned organizations respectfully urge the House Committee on Natural Resources to reject the section of the reconciliation bill that would allow or facilitate copper mining within the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness or its surrounding watershed. The Boundary Waters is the most visited designated Wilderness area in the United States and a nationally treasured ecosystem of immense ecological, cultural, and economic value. Any attempt to weaken, overturn, or roll back existing protections—particularly those that would open the door to sulfide-ore copper mining—poses an unacceptable threat to this irreplaceable landscape and is strongly opposed by our organizations and the communities we represent.

This effort to repeal decisions rooted in science, legal precedent, public opinion, and economic data represents an extremely dangerous precedent for America's public lands and the conservation of the nation's most sensitive and beloved ecosystems. We urge the Committee to reject section 80131, which includes the revocation of the current 20-year copper mining ban in the watershed of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and Voyageurs National Park, automatically approve all applications for new preference right leases, and block any judicial review of future permits and leases within the watershed of the Boundary Waters and Voyageurs.

The Boundary Waters is America's most visited Wilderness, with 165,000 visitors traveling annually from all over the country to experience this unique landscape. Many of these visitors hail from midwestern states, as the Boundary Waters is in America's heartland – the largest Wilderness east of the Rockies and north of the Everglades. Generations of Americans have developed a lifelong love of nature through superb camping, fishing, canoeing, and hiking experiences. The Boundary Waters is not just a place; it is a symbol of the very best of what America's public lands have to offer - natural beauty, economic stability, recreation, expansive habitat, accessibility, clean air and water, and much more.

The love for the Boundary Waters powers a strong and enduring recreation economy in Northeastern Minnesota responsible for 17,000 jobs and over \$1 billion in sales annually in the region. This includes many businesses that will be seriously damaged if sulfide-ore copper mining were allowed in this fragile environment. The Wilderness is also a crown-jewel of Minnesota and important to the state's growing \$13.5 billion outdoor economy. Economic studies show that protecting the Boundary Waters would produce far better outcomes for the

economy than opening the area to copper mining, both in terms of the number of jobs created and total income generated.

A vast collection of science shows that if a copper mine was built along the rivers and streams flowing into the Wilderness, pollution and environmental degradation would be certain. This is a destructive and poisonous type of mining that has never been done before in Minnesota. The U.S. Forest Service released an Environmental Assessment comprising all the available science, economics, public health, and public opinion, and found that this type of mining would cause irreversible damage to the Boundary Waters and Voyageurs National Park.

The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness is a national treasure – an American icon that represents the best of what public lands have to offer. We urge you to oppose any efforts to advance toxic sulfide ore copper mining on the doorstep of America's most visited Wilderness in this reconciliation process and to uphold protections for the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and its watershed for this and future generations.

Sincerely,

6th Woodrunners OSG

Adaptive Wilderness Within Reach

American Hunters & Anglers

American Rivers Action Fund

Californians for Western Wilderness

Camp Kooch-i-ching

Cascade Forest Conservancy

Center for Biological Diversity

Citizens for a Safe & Clean Lake Superior

Conservation Minnesota

Crow River Trail Guards

Earthjustice

Emily Mine Information Group

Endangered Species Coalition

Environment Minnesota

Food and Water Watch

Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness

Great Old Broads for Wilderness: Tucson

Great Old Broads for Wilderness: Minnesota

HBCUs Outside

Idaho Rivers United

League of Conservation Voters

Minnesota Division Izaak Walton League of America

Montana Environmental Information Center

National Parks Conservation Association

Natural Resources Defense Council

Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness

Rewilding Institute

River Alliance of Wisconsin

Save the Boundary Waters

Sierra Club

Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance

Sportsmen for the Boundary Waters

St Croix Chippewa Indians of Wisconsin

Standing Trees

Superior Highland Backcountry

The Conservation Alliance

The Wilderness Society

Upper Peninsula Environmental Coalition

Voyageurs Conservancy

W.J. McCabe Chapter, Izaak Walton League of America

WaterLegacy

Winter Wildlands Alliance