



**FRIENDS OF THE
BOUNDARY
WATERS**

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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 Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness (“Friends”) and our thousands of members across the country, I am submitting this letter to urge the House Natural Resources Committee to reject Section 80131 (Superior National Forest Lands in Minnesota) in the Committee Print that is being considered for reconciliation.

Friends was founded nearly fifty years ago to lead the successful effort to enact the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Act of 1978, which enshrined the protections that have made this 1.1 million-acre wilderness area what is today: a water wonderland of more than 1,200 lakes with water so clean that you can drink directly from the lakes and which attracts more than 165,000 visitors annually, making it the most popular wilderness area in the United States and an anchor of the regional economy in northeastern Minnesota.

Section 80131 of the Committee Print is nothing more than a handout to the billionaire owners of the Chilean mining conglomerate Antofagasta, which is owned by the wealthiest family in all of South America.

Deceptively, Antofagasta’s name does not appear in Section 80131, but their greedy fingerprints are all over this legislation. Section 80131 would give mineral leases to Antofagasta for a copper-sulfide mine that would discharge sulfuric acid (battery acid) into the network of lakes of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.

Copper-sulfide mining is difficult to do safely under the best of circumstances, but in the water-rich environment of northeastern Minnesota, this type of mining – which has never been done in Minnesota with our thousands of lakes – is reckless beyond comprehension. After the Chilean mining conglomerate pollutes the Boundary Waters, American taxpayers would be saddled with the cleanup costs.

There is a tortured and comical effort in Section 80131 to suggest that this handout to Antofagasta would somehow be a substantial revenue generator for our federal government and be worthy of consideration in a reconciliation bill. This is nonsense.

The reference in Section 80131 to the miniscule amounts of rental fees of \$1 or \$2 per acre and similar one-time fees of \$100 or \$250 just underscore what a handout this legislation is to Chilean billionaires. A more useful point of comparison is the payment of more than \$23 billion by the mining conglomerates responsible for the damages from the 2015 Brumodino mine disaster in Brazil. Indeed, Antofagasta's mine in Minnesota would cost the federal government money, rather than generate revenue for the federal government.

Finally, Section 80131 on page 47, beginning on line 13 of the Amendment offered by Congressman Westerman contains a provision preventing judicial review of the handout to Antofagasta.

Why keep the court out?

Because the Chilean billionaires who own Antofagasta have something to hide.

Section 80131 is not just unwise, it is un-American.

On behalf of Friends of the Boundary Wilderness, our thousands of members, and the more than 165,000 people from across the country who visit the Boundary Waters each year, I urge the Committee to come to its senses and reject Section 80131.

Sincerely,

Chris Knopf
Executive Director
Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness

