



February 5, 2020

The Honorable Alan Lowenthal
Chairman
Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Energy & Mineral
Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Paul Gosar
Ranking Member
Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Energy & Mineral
Resources
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Lowenthal, Ranking Member Gosar, and Members of the Subcommittee:

On behalf of our more than one million members and supporters, The Wilderness Society (TWS) writes to support H.R. 5598, the Boundary Waters Wilderness Protection and Pollution Prevention Act, being heard in the Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources on February 5, 2020. We respectfully request our views be submitted into the hearing record.

H.R. 5598, the Boundary Waters Wilderness Protection and Pollution Prevention Act would permanently withdraw approximately 234,000 acres of federal lands in the Superior National Forest in Minnesota from mineral entry, thereby protecting America's most visited Wilderness, the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, and Voyageurs National Park from toxic sulfide-ore copper mining in its headwaters.

The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in the Superior National Forest of northeastern Minnesota is made up of 1.1 million acres of interconnected lakes and rivers and is located next to Voyageurs National Park, and Quetico Provincial Park. The Boundary Waters not only provides habitat for wildlife, it is a refuge for people from every state in the U.S. who visit the Boundary Waters to fish, canoe, hike, recreate, and enjoy its forests, tranquil lakes, trails, and more than 1,200 miles of canoe routes. The Boundary Waters is core to the region's booming outdoor recreation industry, which generates \$913 million in revenue and supports more than 17,000 local jobs annually.

In 2016 the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) issued a Record of Decision finding that sulfide-ore copper mining in the watershed of the Boundary Waters risked "harm to this unique, iconic, and irreplaceable Wilderness area." In order to protect the Boundary Waters, the USFS and Bureau of Land Management (BLM) rejected the renewal of federal mineral leases to Twin Metals and the leases expired. The USFS then initiated the withdrawal of approximately 234,000 acres of USFS lands from new mining. A 2019 economic study by Harvard Professor James H. Stock, Ph.D., former chair of Harvard's economics department, found that protecting this watershed from copper mining would result in 1,500 to 4,600 additional jobs and \$100 million to \$900 million in additional income over a 20-year period in an already thriving outdoor recreation-based economy.

Despite the clear case against mining in this area, the Trump Administration has moved aggressively to advance the destructive Twin Metals mine. Twenty months into a 24-month Environmental Assessment (EA), which was nearly completed, the Trump Administration abruptly cancelled the EA and the USFS's application for a mineral withdrawal. The cancellation and suppression of the EA and all related reports suggests that the study would have provided further support for a mineral withdrawal and reaffirmed the agency's previous finding that copper sulfide-ore mining would harm this pristine, water-rich ecosystem.

In light of the serious threats posed to this national treasure – from the Twin Metals mine or future similarly toxic mines – we believe H.R. 5598 is necessary and critical to protecting the Boundary Waters for current and future generations. TWS supports H.R. 5598 and we urge all members of the Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee to support H.R. 5598.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Drew McConville". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Drew McConville
Senior Managing Director, Government Relations
The Wilderness Society