



May 26th, 2022

Representative Raul Grijalva  
Chair, Committee on Energy & Natural  
Resources  
1324 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Representative Bruce Westerman  
Ranking Member, Committee on Energy &  
Natural Resources  
1329 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

**RE: Written Testimony, Sportsmen for the Boundary Waters  
H.R. 2794 "*Boundary Waters Wilderness Protection and Pollution Prevention Act*"**

Members of the House Natural Resources Committee, and Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony for the record on behalf of H.R. 2794 (Rep. McCollum), the "*Boundary Waters Wilderness Protection and Pollution Prevention Act*." Sportsmen for the Boundary Waters, founded in 2015, including the organization's 25,000 members, supporters and donors from across the United States write to express our support for Rep. Betty McCollum's *Boundary Waters Wilderness Protection and Pollution Prevention Act* (H.R. 2794), and for the proposed withdrawal, for a 20-year term, of approximately 225,000 acres of National Forest System lands in the Rainy River/Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) watershed, from disposition under the United States mineral and geothermal leasing laws, subject to valid existing rights.

Unlike Minnesota's iron and taconite mines, regionally untested sulfide-ore copper mining threatens fish, wildlife, water quality, and world-class camping, paddling, fishing, and hunting opportunities in one of our country's prized areas. The Boundary Waters is America's most-visited Wilderness Area, and similar mineral withdrawal studies in the watershed of Yellowstone National Park and the Grand Canyon have been conducted to evaluate the feasibility of other projects near America's most-valued public lands and waters.

***Support H.R. 2794, Boundary Waters Wilderness Protection and Pollution Prevention Act***

H.R. 2794 would withdraw 234,328 acres of public land and waters in the Rainy River Watershed of the Superior National Forest (SNF) from proposed hardrock mineral leases from disposition under the United States mineral and geothermal leasing laws, subject to valid existing rights. H.R. 2794 permits for new and existing mining, including iron and taconite mining, granite quarrying, logging and other multi-use applications to continue within the proposed withdrawal area, providing clear guidelines for companies seeking to apply for permits and new leases within the SNF, allowing for a multi-use framework on public lands and waters within the SNF.

***We support the passage of H.R. 2794 and encourage swift action and support from members of the Natural Resource Committee.***

Although federal agencies have the discretion to grant up to a 20-year moratorium in the Superior National Forest, H.R. 2794 would codify this moratorium permanently. The Boundary Waters, a world-class Wilderness Area, represents some of the most-accessible public land and water in the entire national forest system, open to the public for hunting, fishing, camping and year-round outdoor recreation.

Thousands of local and regional outdoor recreation-based jobs, businesses, lodges and tourism jobs depend on the Boundary Waters remaining protected from water quality degradation via its tributaries. [A 2018 Harvard Economics Study](#) concluded that protecting the Boundary Waters will generate a greater long-term gain in employment and income for the region than sulfide-ore copper mining, therefore creating even more jobs within the sustainable outdoor recreation economy that the Boundary Waters supports.

Reasonable and enforced federal laws and guidelines related to hard-rock mining in the watershed of the Boundary Waters will guarantee future generations have access to this public land and water in perpetuity.

***Completion and release of mineral withdrawal study of 225,000 acres of National Forest System land in the Rainy River/Boundary Waters watershed***

We support the swift completion of the Environmental Assessment (EA) of approximately 225,000 acres of National Forest System lands in the Rainy River/Boundary Waters watershed, from disposition under the United States mineral and geothermal leasing laws,

subject to valid existing rights. After the completion of said environmental assessment within the Superior National Forest, we support a decision by the United States Forest Service (USFS) to order a moratorium, for a 20-year term on leasing and issuance of any new lands within the designated proposed acreage of the Superior National Forest.

### ***Critical Minerals***

Sportsmen for the Boundary Waters requests that the House Natural Resource Committee and Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources consider the following principles when considering the development of any minerals included on the [2022 list of critical minerals](#).

The need to balance responsible mining with public land values, including quality hunting and fishing opportunities, clean water, and outdoor recreation is an immense challenge. The issue of critical minerals has only elevated this task and conserving fish and wildlife habitats like the Boundary Waters must be central to our strategy to secure supply chains for critical minerals.

### ***Conserve special places with high fish, wildlife and outdoor recreation values***

Presently there are proposals that are simply the wrong mine in the wrong place. In particular, there is a proposed sulfide-ore copper mining upstream of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, Voyageurs National Park, and Canada's Quetico Provincial Park. Should this mine move forward, it could have catastrophic impacts on freshwater supplies, fish and wildlife habitat, and degrade America's most visited Wilderness Area.

We request that Congress prioritize protecting this irreplaceable landscape, and recognize we can both protect our wild places, and meet the material needs to electrify America's energy grid through a mix of additional domestic mining recycling. Thus reducing demand and avoiding high conflict areas that risk the health of America's critical fish and wildlife habitat.

### ***Acid Mine Drainage (AMD)***

Renowned hydrologist Dr. Tom Myers' [peer-reviewed published work](#) shows that sulfate from the Twin Metals mine would flow directly into the Boundary Waters, threatening the extremely sensitive aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems of the area.

Exposing sulfide minerals in the ore tailings and waste rock to air and water generates acid mine drainage (AMD), which contains sulfuric acid, heavy metals

(such as copper, zinc and mercury) and sulfates. Spills and seepage from surface storage of waste rock and tailings, tailings pipelines, or other facilities would release AMD to the interconnected streams, lakes, wetlands and groundwater flowing to the Boundary Waters.

High acidity can alter gill membranes, prevent fish from breathing, and alter reproductive success. Copper, mercury and other metals in AMD are toxic to fish and the insects they eat over the short and long term. Sulfates increase the rate of mercury methylation in aquatic environments, leading to more frequent and more serious fish consumption advisories for high mercury content.

Significant fish kills can result from sudden releases of AMD to streams and lakes. For example, a 1989 thunderstorm caused enough acidification and elevated copper concentrations within 20 minutes to kill over 5,000 salmonids in Montana's Clark Fork River, a river with twice the annual flow as the South Kawishiwi River, which flows directly in the Boundary Waters. Mines in the headwaters of streams and rivers, such as the proposed mining near the Boundary Waters, have been shown to be sources of regional stress on fish and wildlife health at a whole watershed or landscape scale.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, Sportsmen for the Boundary Waters strongly supports the passage of *H.R. 2794 The Boundary Waters Wilderness Protection and Pollution Prevention Act*, and encourage the committee to enact its swift passage. We thank the committee for the opportunity to provide testimony and our perspective on the permanent protection of the Boundary Waters. We stand ready to help the Committee find solutions to issues concerning the Boundary Waters and appreciate your leadership on the issues facing our cherished public lands, waters, and wildlife.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Lukas Leaf', written in a cursive style.

Lukas Leaf, executive director  
Sportsmen for the Boundary Waters