

Statement for the Record from Taldi Harrison
Government & Community Affairs
REI Co-op.

Submitted to the House Natural Resources Committee
Energy and Mineral Resources Legislative Hearing
May 24, 2022

Dear Chairman Lowenthal and Ranking Member Stauber:

On behalf of the REI Co-op, I want to thank you for holding a hearing on the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Protection and Pollution Prevention Act.

As you may know, REI is an over 80-year-old co-op and retailer of outdoor gear and apparel. We are dedicated to the notion that time outside is fundamental to a life well lived. We now have over 160 stores, plus a robust online platform as well as over 20 million co-op members across the country. We also provide classes, outings, and adventure travel to hundreds of thousands of Americans every year. Our mission is to awaken in people a lifelong love of the outdoors – to educate and outfit them – and help them enjoy the many benefits of time in nature – irrespective of their backgrounds.

We thank the House Natural Resources Committee for its continued support for outdoor recreation policies, including passage of the SOAR Act, Outdoors For All Act, and others this Congress that would enhance our favorite places and reduce burdens for access. However, in order to cultivate a strong outdoor recreation economy, we must have protected ecosystems where we can spend time outdoors. Protecting the Boundary Waters is a perfect example of the importance of enabling local economies to flourish when we prioritize conservation.

The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Protection and Pollution Prevention Act (H.R. 2794) would permanently protect over 200,000 acres of federal land and waters within the Superior National Forest from sulfide-ore copper mining and subsequent toxic pollution. Bipartisan support for this commonsense bill underscores the importance of protecting federal lands so vital to the region.

At REI, we see across the country the importance of outdoor recreation on a community's local economy. The Boundary Waters are no different with a potential loss of over 27,000 jobs and \$1.4 billion in economic activity should the area be turned into a sulfide-ore copper mining district. Meanwhile, across the country, areas that commit to protecting natural spaces and making them easily accessible are thriving.

Alongside the diverse coalition of local community leaders, tribes, non-profits, and outdoor recreation businesses, we support protecting Boundary Waters. We have supported tribal leadership throughout the process and will continue to stand with tribal voices and community interests to protect this important ecosystem.

We urge you to include the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness Protection and Pollution Prevention Act in an upcoming markup and advance the bill out of your committee. This important legislation, if passed, will give the region greater stability and assure outdoor recreationists that these beautiful places will be around for future generations to enjoy.