

For Immediate Release

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SAVE THE BOUNDARY WATERS

Biden administration cancels Twin Metals leases next to Boundary Waters; restores rule of law

Administration finds leases unlawfully reinstated; new decision restores legal consensus of five presidential administrations including Democrats and Republicans and allows for science-based decision on where risky mining is appropriate

(Ely, MN)--Today the Biden administration announced that it cancelled two unlawfully reinstated Twin Metals leases for sulfide-ore copper mining next to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW). This action restores the legal interpretation of 5 previous presidential administrations, including both Democrats and Republicans, from Lyndon Johnson to Ronald Reagan to Barack Obama. In a press release the Department of Interior (DOI) said it determined that the expired Twin Metals leases were unlawfully reinstated by the prior administration. This reinstatement violated federal laws and regulations, including the legal requirement that the U.S. Forest Service must consent to mineral leases. In 2016, the U.S. Forest Service withheld its consent to the Twin Metals leases because of the risk to the BWCAW; this decision still stands.

"Today is a major win for Boundary Waters protection," said **Becky Rom, National Chair of the Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters**. "This action by the Biden administration re-establishes the long-standing legal consensus of five presidential administrations and marks a return of the rule of law. It also allows for science-based decision-making on where risky mining is inappropriate. It is heartening to have an administration making decisions with integrity. Twin Metals leases should never have been reinstated in the first place, and this announcement should stop the Twin Metals mine threat."

In 2016, after a two-year scientific review, the U.S. Forest service exercised its statutory prerogative and withheld its consent to the renewal of two expired Twin Metals leases. These leases would have allowed Twin Metals to build highly toxic and polluting sulfide-ore copper mines along lakes and streams that flow directly into the Boundary Waters. The U.S. Forest

Service found that "the inherent risk of irreparable harm" posed by such mining to the priceless Wilderness location could not be permitted consistent with its legal obligations to protect the Boundary Waters. Although the leases were not renewed and expired because the U.S. Forest Service withheld its consent, heavy lobbying by Antofagasta (including purchasing a house that was later rented by Jared Kushner and Ivanka Trump) led to the unlawful reinstatement by the Trump administration.

"The legal decision by the U.S. Department of the Interior is an important affirmation that the rule of law is a pillar of our society," **said Tom Heffelfinger Former United States Attorney, District of Minnesota and Of Counsel, Best & Flanagan.** "The prior administration ignored the law when it reinstated the expired Antofagasta/Twin Metals leases. The decision this week rightly acknowledges the statutory right of the U.S. Forest Service to deny consent to renewal of the leases. The Department of the Interior properly determined that such disregard of law could not be allowed to stand."

The Biden administration is currently considering whether mining in the watershed of the Boundary Waters should be banned. In October it announced the initiation of a mineral withdrawal process that could lead to a ban on mining for up to 20 years. That process results in an environmental study of the impact of sulfide-ore mining on the Boundary Waters and surrounding communities. The Biden administration announced today that Twin Metals cannot reapply for federal mineral leases in the watershed of the BWCAW at this time because of the initiation of the mineral withdrawal process.

U.S. Rep. Betty McCollum has introduced legislation to protect the Boundary Waters by permanently banning sulfide-ore mining on federal lands within the Wilderness watershed. A state counterpart to McCollum's bill, authored by State Sen. Steve Cwudzinski and State Rep. Kelly Morrison, would ban sulfide-ore mining on state lands in the Wilderness watershed.

The Boundary Waters is the most heavily visited wilderness area in the United States, attracting more than 160,000 visitors from all over the world and helps drive more than [\\$900 million](#) in annual economic activity and helps support over 17,000 jobs. [A peer-reviewed independent study](#) from Harvard University showed that protecting the Boundary Waters from a proposed Twin Metals sulfide-ore copper mine would result in dramatically more jobs and more income over a 20-year period. The study, written by Harvard University's Professor James Stock, found that:

"[T]he proposed mining would lead to a boom-bust cycle that is typical of resource extraction economies, exacerbated by the likely negative effect on the recreation industry" and that "over the 20-year time horizon of the proposed withdrawal,

introducing copper-nickel mining in the Superior National Forest is likely to have a negative effect on the regional economy."

Nearly [seventy percent](#) of Minnesotans support a ban on sulfide-ore copper mining near the Wilderness to permanently protect the Boundary Waters. Last week over 248,000 people submitted public comments supporting a ban on sulfide-ore copper mining in the Boundary Waters Watershed.

What people are saying

Mark Dayton, former Minnesota Governor and US Senator

"We inherited this pristine wilderness from previous generations of Minnesotans, who bequeathed it to us to benefit not only ourselves, but also our children, our grandchildren, and their children and grandchildren. Now it is our responsibility to protect this fragile ecosystem from those who would exploit it for their own selfish purposes...The BWCA is not a 20-year wilderness; the only acceptable goal is permanent protection from copper mining near the Boundary Waters."

Al Franken, former US Senator, Minnesota

"I've been going to the Boundary Waters since I was a teenager and have returned throughout my life to experience its beauty, serenity, and walleyes. As a Senator, I was privileged to hear all sides of issues of importance to Minnesotans. I understand the desire and need for more economic activity on the Iron Range. But I have come to the conclusion that copper-nickel mining does not belong anywhere near this unbelievably precious wilderness area that is visited by almost a quarter million people a year. It is a treasure and one of the economic drivers of Northern Minnesota."

Sally Jewell, former Secretary of the Interior

"The Biden Administration and Congress can join the pantheon of this nation's great conservationists. By prohibiting copper mining adjacent to the Wilderness and conserving this vital ecosystem and all the species it nurtures, our leaders can protect this precious and irreplaceable natural wonder not just for now, but for generations to follow."

Theodore Roosevelt IV

"It is irresponsible to jeopardize an irreplaceable resource for something readily available elsewhere. President Theodore Roosevelt, who created Superior National Forest in 1909, implored Americans to "cherish" the nation's "natural wonders" as a "sacred heritage for your

children and your children's children." By acting now, we will fulfill our generation's responsibilities to protect Minnesota's outdoor heritage of the Boundary Waters for the sake of all Americans today and tomorrow. Let's heed the call of the wilderness."

Tom Tidwell, former Chief of the United States Forest Service of the Department of Agriculture

"The Boundary Waters is one of the most valuable natural landscapes on earth. It has sparkling clean water and attracts hundreds of thousands of wilderness travelers and tourists. The Boundary Waters is also a bedrock of sustainable economic support for hundreds of local businesses and thousands of employees. But an industrial mining district in the Boundary Waters watershed would forever change the landscape, undercut the wilderness character of the Boundary Waters, and continuously produce pollution that would flow directly into the Wilderness. There are much less risky places to mine, but there is only one Boundary Waters. This is why we need a permanent ban on mining in the headwaters."

Professor Tadd M. Johnson, Esq., member of the Bois Forte Band of Chippewa, MN

"Indigenous peoples sought sustenance and spirituality from this place from time immemorial. On the outskirts of the Boundary Waters, and inside of this wilderness, my family lived and thrived for generations. This is a place of pristine air, clear water, tall pines, wildlife, ancient cliffs and adventure. Those who came before us had the wisdom to preserve it, and we must respect their wisdom. It must be preserved."

[St. Louis County Commissioners Frank Jewell and two other St. Louis County, MN Commissioners](#)

"As local elected officials, we know the importance citizens place on the wild north woods of Minnesota. It is why many of them tell [us] they live in northeastern Minnesota and why others say they have recently moved here. The Boundary Waters and Voyageurs are national treasures. Sulfide-ore copper mining has a record of pollution and environmental degradation in the United States and elsewhere in the world. Allowing this type of mining at the edge of the Boundary Waters and upstream of Voyageurs, a unique and fragile ecosystem, would be a recipe for disaster"

Brenda Halter, former Supervisor, Superior National Forest, MN

"The proposed Twin Metals mine is neither ecologically nor economically sustainable. Once the mine fails, there is simply no way to contain it without sacrificing the wilderness and the long-term economic sustainability that it supports. All of the science and all of our experience tell us that in this extremely valuable, water-rich and highly interconnected place, you simply cannot have both."

Hans Cole, VP of Environmental Activism, Patagonia

"Bottom line, sulfide ore copper mining proposed on the edge of the Boundary Waters presents a deadly threat to everything that makes this area unique: it's a wild place with world-class qualities, a beloved destination for fishing, hunting, camping, paddling and hiking, and a thriving local and regional outdoor recreation economy that relies on a pristine wilderness. The only way to ensure that our kids and future generations have the opportunities to experience what so many of us have enjoyed is this: we must work together to protect the clean water, lakes and interconnected waterways of the Boundary Waters, forever."

Jamie Williams, President of The Wilderness Society.

"The Interior Department's decision to cancel these illegally renewed mineral leases is a victory for the Boundary Waters and the people who love them. It represents an important step in saving more nature and reaching the Biden administration's America The Beautiful conservation goals. If we sacrifice the health of the most-visited, water-rich, and beloved wilderness in the nation to extractive industry, where will we draw the line? The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness is simply too precious and too integral to the lives of Minnesotans to take a chance on a risky, toxic mine. We are thrilled that the Biden administration recognizes the importance of safeguarding the Boundary Waters, and look forward to the day that permanent protections are passed in Congress."

Steve Piragis, Owner of Piragis Northwoods Company in Ely, MN

"What we need to do is think about what are the long-term implications of hard rock mining near the Boundary Waters. We're not going to be able to bring it back so we have to be very careful about what kind of industries we allow at wilderness edge communities like Ely. Industrialization will change this place, change this town, change our wilderness and we have a chance to save this so let's take that opportunity."

Jason Zabokrtsky, Owner, Ely Outfitting Company in Ely MN

"The Boundary Waters is an economic engine that supports wilderness edge communities. Protecting this national treasure from risky sulfide ore copper mining is vital to the local communities and regional economies that depend on clean water, healthy forests and a pristine Boundary Waters Wilderness."

Ann McNally, Girl Scouts Minnesota and Wisconsin Lakes and Pines, near Ely, MN

"The Boundary Waters is a perfect example of an accessible wilderness that allows Girl Scouts to discover the power of teamwork and their own strength. Girl Scouts finish canoe trips with a swagger to their step, an ability to creatively solve problems with people from different backgrounds, and an ambition to tackle emerging challenges in our world. Protecting the

Boundary Waters is vital to ensuring that future generations of Girl Scouts have the same formative opportunities."

Theresa Salus, REI Co-op Experiences Manager of Field Services

"Minnesota's Boundary Waters Canoe Area (BWCA) houses an expansive network of waterways and forest trails connected to more than 1,000 local lakes. The area is a national treasure that is a point of pride for Minnesotans and a critical region for tribal communities to harvest their rice, fish, and exercise their treaty rights. Every year, the BWCA draws thousands of visitors who come to marvel at its pristine waters and enjoy time outside as they camp, canoe, and engage in all of the outdoor recreation opportunities this special place provides. Ensuring that every person can enjoy the Boundary Waters requires us to protect it from mining or other harmful activities, as we have a responsibility to future generations to preserve this irreplaceable landscape."

Jack Lee, Executive Director, Voyageur Outward Bound School, near Ely, MN

"Voyageur Outward Bound School's mission is critically tied to the health of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. Since 1964, the Boundary Waters has been our classroom and where we serve our students. Any pollution that could threaten these waterways or land threaten our mission to change lives by using the wilderness to provide unparalleled opportunities for personal growth, self-reliance, confidence, teamwork and compassion"

Lise Aangeenbrug, Outdoor Industry Association Executive Director

"Protecting America's unique outdoor spaces like the Boundary Waters is critical to ensuring people can enjoy the outdoors for decades to come," "We're glad to see the Biden administration take meaningful steps to strengthen the public lands and waterways that play a key role in ensuring communities, people, and the economy continue to thrive."

Shoren Brown, Director of Government Affairs, The Conservation Alliance

"The Boundary Waters is America's most visited wilderness and protecting its recreational opportunities and wild nature is a top priority for our 270 member companies at The Conservation Alliance. Building a mine in this pristine location would threaten over 17,000 jobs and a billion dollars in annual income in the region. We will continue to work tirelessly alongside our local partners to ensure that this area is protected and the local economy that depends on it thrives into the future.

Ben Alexandro, Senior Government Affairs Advocate League of Conservation Voters

"We are thrilled to see the Biden-Harris administration take these critical steps towards protecting the Boundary Waters. Mining companies should not be allowed to pollute America's

most visited wilderness area and put at risk the vital outdoor recreation jobs, clean water, and wildlife habitat it provides for the communities of northeast Minnesota – and we are glad to see the Trump-era opinion that allowed the renewal of these leases to be revoked. We applaud Secretary Deb Haaland for her leadership and look forward to next steps from the Department of Interior and the rest of the administration to ensure that this watershed will never face the risk of toxic mining.”

Bob Tammen, retired mine electrician, Soudan, MN

"I started working in mines over fifty years ago. Because mining is boom and bust, I worked in several states before I retired. When my wife and I return to some of the places where I worked in mines, we do not see economic prosperity. In Palmer, Michigan, we saw grass growing under the playground swings at an elementary school that closed after a mine operating just across the highway shut down. In Silver Bow, Montana, we saw dust blowing off of unpaved streets near a silicon refining plant I helped build in the 1990's. Northeast of Brainerd, we visited the town of Manganese, Minnesota. It is a ghost town. Only a few forlorn chimneys stand as witness to shattered dreams of prosperity. Mining promoters are good at public relations, but they are failures at creating prosperity”

Duane Behrens, former union miner, Ely, MN

"My primary concern with Twin Metals' proposed mining plan is one of financial responsibility. These operations seem to have an unbroken record of contaminating their environment, often catastrophically. Twin Metals is owned by Antofagasta. But I've seen nothing to indicate that that corporation's officers and major stockholders are tied to the project financially. If "Twin Metals" is solely responsible for the eventual contamination that always follows in the wake of these things, who is responsible for the costs of cleanup? What is to stop Twin Metals from simply going bankrupt and leaving those costs to the taxpayers? That's what happened at the mines I was employed at in Wyoming, and I'm very afraid the same thing is beginning to play out near the Boundary Waters."

Peter Paine, Jr., Board Member and Former Chair of the Adirondack Nature Conservancy and Adirondack Land Trust

"I have been coming to the BWCA for over 25 years and was greatly concerned about the Twin Metals proposal to open a copper mine on the South Kawishiwi River. The Trump administration, rejecting scientific studies demonstrating there was no way the leachate could be successfully contained for centuries, pushed ahead with this project in spite of strong local opposition. It is a great relief that the Biden administration appears to be taking steps to cancel the project which should lead to permanent protection for the BWCA watershed.”

Amy and Dave Freeman, wilderness adventurers, advocates, and authors of A Year in the Wilderness: Bearing Witness in the Boundary Waters

"In the Boundary Waters, the land and water speak. The land and water speak through the call of a loon echoing across a still lake, the muffled fall of snowflakes, the metamorphosis of dragonflies, and the scent of wild rice. Actions show if you have listened to the land and the water. Thank you to the leaders who have heeded their plea and earned their gratitude, and the gratitude of future generations who will visit the Boundary Waters and further strengthen the connection humans have with the land and the water. "

Lloyd Vogel, Enlightened Equipment, Winona MN

"The Boundary Waters is a unique and wildly important space that plays an exceptionally defining role in the identity, community and culture of Minnesotan life. As a vast wilderness space, it plays a pivotal role in the environmental health of our region. As a recreational area, it provides thousands of people (from all over the world) with immersive and transformative connections to the natural world. As businesses, voters, and elected officials, there is no more important charge than protecting wilderness spaces for future generations."

Dave and Nancy Seaton, Hungry Jack Outfitters, Gunflint Trail, MN

"Clean water is more valuable than copper. Healthy forests are more valuable than nickel. Accessible wilderness is more valuable to the world's citizens than corporate profit. Last I checked, they aren't making any more wilderness."

Rob Coughlin, Granite Gear Partner and GM, Two Harbors, MN

"The magic of the The Boundary Waters Canoe Area is almost indescribable to those who have not visited. The network of pristine lakes, streams, trails and surrounding forest teems with wildlife. They tell stories of the past and the indigenous peoples who called this area their home. The threat of sulfide-ore copper mining on the edge of this wilderness is unimaginable. This toxic mining method's history speaks for itself. It's not simply a possibility that the byproducts produced by sulfide-ore copper will leach into the water supply. It's guaranteed. If we don't keep fighting to protect this unmatched and irreplaceable national treasure, we will have failed our future generations."

Bear Paulsen, Northstar Canoes, Princeton, MN

"Minnesota is the land of sky blue waters and 10,000 lakes. The lakes of the BWCA epitomize Minnesota. They are the state's identity. The state bird, fish, flower, tree, and grain all thrive in the BWCA. When Minnesota markets itself as a tourist destination the BWCA is always prominently featured. The BWCA is Minnesota's most wonderful and valuable asset. It must remain untrammled and pure for future generations to love."

Todd Randall, Owner/Craftsman, Sanborn Canoe Co., Winona, MN

“Trips to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness have played a pivotal role in my life. Apart from the BWCA, Sanborn Canoe doesn't exist. Sanborn was born out of long days on the water in a canoe (or a hammock) and fireside chats reaching deep into the night. Time slows in the wilderness, creating space for big dreams and the inspiration for the next adventure. Every time I return to the BWCA, I find a deeper connection to the woods and the waters and to myself and the life that surrounds us. This connection is lost in the constant hurry of modern life. It would be unforgivable to destroy yet another sacred place to simply earn another buck.”

Mike Cichanowski, Wenonah Canoe, Winona, MN

“This decision is a big deal for the Paddlesports industry. We all depend on a healthy Boundary Waters in our business. Copper is not in short supply so why even consider risking the world's best canoe country. Most of the canoes we make end up at some point in the Boundary Waters. We need it clean for us to prosper here in Winona.”

Jessie Thomas Blate, American Rivers

“The Kawishiwi River and the Boundary Waters has been identified on the list of America's Most Endangered Rivers for several years because of the pressing threat of sulfide-ore copper mining. This type of mining poses an unacceptable risk to the clean rivers, streams and lakes of the Boundary Waters, and this is the year we must finally stop these mining proposals once and for all.”

Bobby McEnaney, Natural Resources Defense Council

“This smart move will benefit generations to come by helping to protect America's most visited wilderness area from the unnecessary expansion of new mining in the Boundary Waters. The Biden Administration recognizes that we simply can't allow this kind of unacceptable threat to the natural beauty and integrity of this ecosystem and the viability of the area's outdoor economy.”

James Edward Mills, outdoors writer and founder of The Joy Trip Project

“Copper/nickel mining in the communities around the Boundary Waters Canoe Area would be an ecological disaster. Damaging the surrounding land and water resources would put at risk the physical health and well being of local residents as well as the livelihood of retailers, outfitters and restaurateurs who rely on the economic engine of the most popular wilderness area in America. I am very excited to know that the Biden Administration has made natural resource conservation a priority and I am grateful to the Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters for pressing the cause of environmental protection.”

Lauren Berutich, Great Old Broads for Wilderness, Durango, CO

"In a time of environmental catastrophe and the climate crisis, we have the responsibility to do everything possible to protect public lands and their valuable resources. By restoring facts and science as the grounding principles by which we manage our natural resources and fight the climate crisis, the Biden administration is taking great strides to permanently protect the Boundary Waters Wilderness Area from toxic sulfide-ore copper mining."

Christine Goepfert, Midwest Associate Director for the National Parks Conservation Association.

"Sulfide-ore copper mining is one of the most toxic industries and does not belong near the Boundary Waters or Voyageurs National Park. Voyageurs depends on clean water for the world-class fishing and recreation it provides to thousands of visitors annually, and healthy fish and wildlife that call this park home. The Biden Administration's decisive action today will help safeguard this treasured area."

John Rust, Minnesota Division President of the Izaak Walton League of America

Scott Kovarovics, Executive Director Izaak Walton League of America

The Izaak Walton League fully supports the Biden Administration's move today and supports the proposed 20 year mineral withdrawal to protect the Boundary Waters from the threat of copper-nickel mining. The Izaak Walton League has been engaged in the international efforts to protect this treasured resource since the 1920s. We've long known that the present resource use (Wilderness) is the highest and best use of these fragile public lands and waters. That the Bureau of Land Management and the United States Forest Service also recognize their responsibilities as trustees of these resources is also vital to all who love and strive to protect the only water based and the most heavily used wilderness in North America.

Blaine Miller-McFeeley, Earthjustice Legislative Representative

"This is a historic day for the Boundary Waters, and we are thankful the Biden Administration recognizes that we don't need to sacrifice our public and culturally significant lands for the profits of polluting industries. We've known for a long time that the Boundary Waters is an important source of drinking water, a place of stunning wilderness, and a critical part of a vibrant local economy. It's long past time to prioritize science over politics and permanently protect the Boundary Waters from the interests of greedy mining companies."

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