

**Statement of
Congressman Tom Emmer
Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources Legislative Hearing
July 27, 2017**

Thank you Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Lowenthal, and the entire Committee for hosting this hearing and allowing me to participate in a discussion that is so important to my state of Minnesota.

We are here to discuss the reversal of a politically motivated and shortsighted action by the outgoing Obama Administration to withdraw 400,000 acres in the Superior National Forest from mining and the refusal to renew mineral leases that have previously been reauthorized without issue.

When the Superior National Forest was established in 1909 - and later when the Boundary Waters Canoe Area was established in 1978 - there was an express agreement between the federal government and the state of Minnesota that certain activities like mining and logging could continue in the Superior National Forest. In fact, in the current Superior National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, exploration and mining is considered a “desired condition.”

Last December, after the election and before the new administration took office, the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management refused to renew Minnesota’s mineral leases and started the process of withdrawing about 400,000 acres from development.

Considering the timing and the fact that a nearly identical programmatic withdrawal was proposed to the Obama Administration just two years earlier but was denied this unexpected action during the waning days of the last Administration was clearly politically motivated and not based on sound policy.

We have the opportunity today to fix this.

By considering this proposal, you are not authorizing any mining project in the Superior National Forest. We are simply recognizing the right of Minnesotans to exercise their mineral rights if any proposed mining can satisfy all the stringent environmental requirements

I have no doubt that we can find a way to preserve our state’s pristine landscape without allowing it to also become devoid of the economic development or job creation needed to thrive.

Like all Minnesotans, I believe in ensuring we protect our environment and natural beauty for future generations.

To be clear, there is no current project proposal for Twin Metals to mine in the watershed of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. **None.** Nor does this bill change the law to allow for mining or mineral exploration in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area.

Therefore, the proposed withdrawal would impose a haphazard, overly expansive ban before any project is even considered.

Underground mining can take decades to plan and execute and must be done in accordance with the appropriate environmental and permitting regulations.

Our steps today would simply allow the process to get moving.

This process begins with exploration, surveys, and feasibility studies – which include environmental protection measures.

Should extensive preliminary research indicate a mine would be economically viable, the company must still prepare and propose a detailed process for a plant that adheres to existing state and federal laws.

After all this is said and done the relevant federal agencies will publish a Notice of Intent to begin to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement.

This then requires extensive periods of public comment, as well as responses to public comment. Then, there are required waiting periods and more published information before a final decision is made.

But wait, there is more.

Even after all this, the project must apply for federal and state permits, which both have separate environmental process reviews and in many cases, more hearings.

And, this does not even detail the processes necessary at the state level.

The point I am trying to make is that our discussion draft before the Committee today not only protects the jobs of thousands and the local economies of many small towns in Minnesota, but it also leaves intact an extensive process which will preserve the environment and the Boundary Waters.

This is about Minnesota's rights to these leases, which was part of negotiations made decades ago when the Boundary Waters were set aside and preserved.

With the potential to bring jobs to Minnesota for decades to come, we must get government out of the way so that leases can be renewed, studies can be conducted, and Minnesotans can ensure the safe, responsible, and precise development of all that our great state has to offer.

With this progress, we have a real opportunity to change the future success of this region.

Minnesota deserves a chance to show once again that it can develop these areas in an environmentally responsible manner.

Again, thank you to Chairman Gosar and your staff for your tireless work on this issue. I appreciate the committee taking the time to review the discussion draft before us today and look forward to answering any questions you may have. I yield back the remaining balance of my time.