

January 11, 2022

F. David Radford, Deputy State Director of Geospatial Services
BLM Eastern States Office
RE: Superior National Forest Withdrawal Application
5275 Leesburg Pike
Falls Church, Virginia 22041

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BUREAU OF LAND MGMT
EASTERN STATES OFFICE
2022 JAN 26 A 9:21

Submitted via email to BLM_ES_Lands@blm.gov and mail

Dear Deputy State Director Radford,

We write to you today as superintendents of schools in northeastern Minnesota. We wish to submit public comment regarding the U.S. Forest Service and the Bureau of Land Management's proposal to withdraw 225,000 acres of lands and minerals from future exploration and projects in Minnesota. Northeast Minnesota is the number one iron ore producer in the nation, and Minnesota's iron industry currently supports more than 4,000 workers with good, family-sustaining jobs. Northeastern Minnesota is also blessed with the world's largest undeveloped copper-nickel deposit, called the Duluth Complex. Several companies – in various stages of exploration, review and permitting - have invested heavily in developing this resource. While these projects are not yet operational, the non-ferrous industry has the potential to support our families and communities for generations to come, as well as contribute to our state's strong educational system through the Permanent School Trust Fund.

In Minnesota, we have school trust lands that are set aside for a specific purpose – to provide a continual source of funding for public education. These lands are managed so that they create a funding source for our schools, supporting over 900,000 K-12 students across the state of Minnesota. The largest financial contributions come from logging and iron mining, in addition to leasing for mineral exploration. Minnesota schools will receive \$36 million dollars this school year alone from the school trust fund. We are extremely concerned that there could be a loss of revenue due to groups who want to stop all mining and not trust the scientific review overseen by our trusted state agencies.

As superintendents, entrusted with the education of our students, we believe that mining projects should follow the established, transparent, predictable and fair environmental review process currently in place after a company submits a formal project proposal. We do not believe we should sacrifice our water, the environment, cultural and historic resources or the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness for jobs and development. We trust in science and due to project-specific scientific records, modern technology, and global industry best practices, we believe we can safely and responsibly do both. Mining projects should continue to be evaluated individually and specific to their site, design and geology.

We further ask you to consider that the EIS should consider the withdrawal impact of losing \$2.4 billion in royalty revenue for the state's Permanent School Trust Fund that would support the education of nearly 900,000 K-12 students statewide. The EIS should formally study the impact the withdrawal will have on the ability of Minnesota and private entities to seek development of state and private minerals

within the withdrawal area. This issue of impacts beyond the 225,000 acres needs specific and extensive study.

The USFS and BLM should also study the implications to the region's healthcare system and infrastructure which has seen declining populations, lagging personal incomes, and increasing seasonal residency. The environmental assessment should study the disparity in health insurance coverage available to families in the region, whether they must depend on seasonal tourism jobs with few or no benefits, or whether jobs are available that provide strong healthcare benefits.

As leaders of the public K-12 schools in northern Minnesota, we are entrusted with the education of the future workers, citizens, and leaders in our nation. We educate them on topics that include science, math, art, geography, and social studies. We encourage them to believe in science and facts by testing and learning proven standards and methods. We believe that the federal government should also follow the science and not simply make a political decision based off of public opinion. We believe the government should thoroughly study and vet any proposed mines prior to any approval. If we stand by scientific standards, how can we not expect our government to also stand by these high standards? Please cancel this land withdrawal and continue the established process of studying each mine plan. With proper oversight, we can mine for the critical minerals we need for our future energy and technology needs as well as provide a constant source of revenue to educate the students of Minnesota now and into the future.

Sincerely,

Richard Aldrich – Hibbing Public Schools

Dan Stifter – Aitkin Public Schools

Adrian Norman – Chisholm Public Schools

Erik Erie – Ely Public Schools

Matt Grose – Grand Rapids Public Schools

Jeff Burgess – Mesabi East Public Schools

Reggie Engebretson – Mt. Iron/ Buhl and St. Louis County Public Schools

Rae Villebrun – Nashwauk Public Schools

Peter Hardy – Nett Lake Public Schools

Noel Schmidt – Rock Ridge Public Schools

Kevin Grover – International Falls Public Schools

Iron Range Superintendents