



## Mississippi Headwaters Board

Crow Wing County Land Service Bldg. - 322 Laurel St. Ste. 34- Brainerd, MN 56401

Web Site: [www.mississippiheadwaters.org](http://www.mississippiheadwaters.org)

September 29, 2021

Congressman Pete Stauber  
501 Laurel Street  
Brainerd, MN 56401

RE: Letter of Support for Land Exchange between the United States Forest Service (USFS) and Bill and Gail Heig (Bowen's Lodge)

Dear Congressman:

In June of 2021, Bill and Gail Heig acquired approximately 34 acres and 1,100 feet of shoreline on Lake Winnibigoshish adjacent to USFS lands. They will soon be proposing a land exchange with the USFS to acquire their current leased marina located on Big Cutfoot Sioux.


There have been exchange opportunities attempted between Bowen's Lodge and the USFS in the past. In 2013, the Deer River Ranger Station initiated a land exchange process between the Chippewa National Forest and Bowen's Lodge; however, due to continuous leadership staffing changes, the exchange became muddled and was ultimately denied in 2014.

The current Comprehensive Plan established on September 1, 2019 gives guidance to land exchanged within the Mississippi Headwaters Board (MHB) Corridor stating, "to increase public land holdings along the Mississippi River and Headwaters Lakes, MHB member counties should initiate exchanges with private land owners who want to exchange their lands".

The MHB board approves that preserving this newly acquired shoreland property on Lake Winnibigoshish, which is currently owned by the Heig Family, will protect the natural and recreational values of the Mississippi River. It also will provide continuity to the existing USFS lands within the area while allowing the Bowen's Resort Property to utilize an existing disturbed marina within the Corridor.

If you have any questions please do not hesitate to call our Executive Director at (218) 824-1189 or email at [timt@mississippiheadwaters.org](mailto:timt@mississippiheadwaters.org).

Sincerely,



Ann Marcotte  
MHB Chairperson (Aitkin County)

Cc: Michael Stansberry, Chippewa National Forest Supervisor

Encl.

## **Bowen Lodge and the USFS Land Exchange**

### **Current Events**

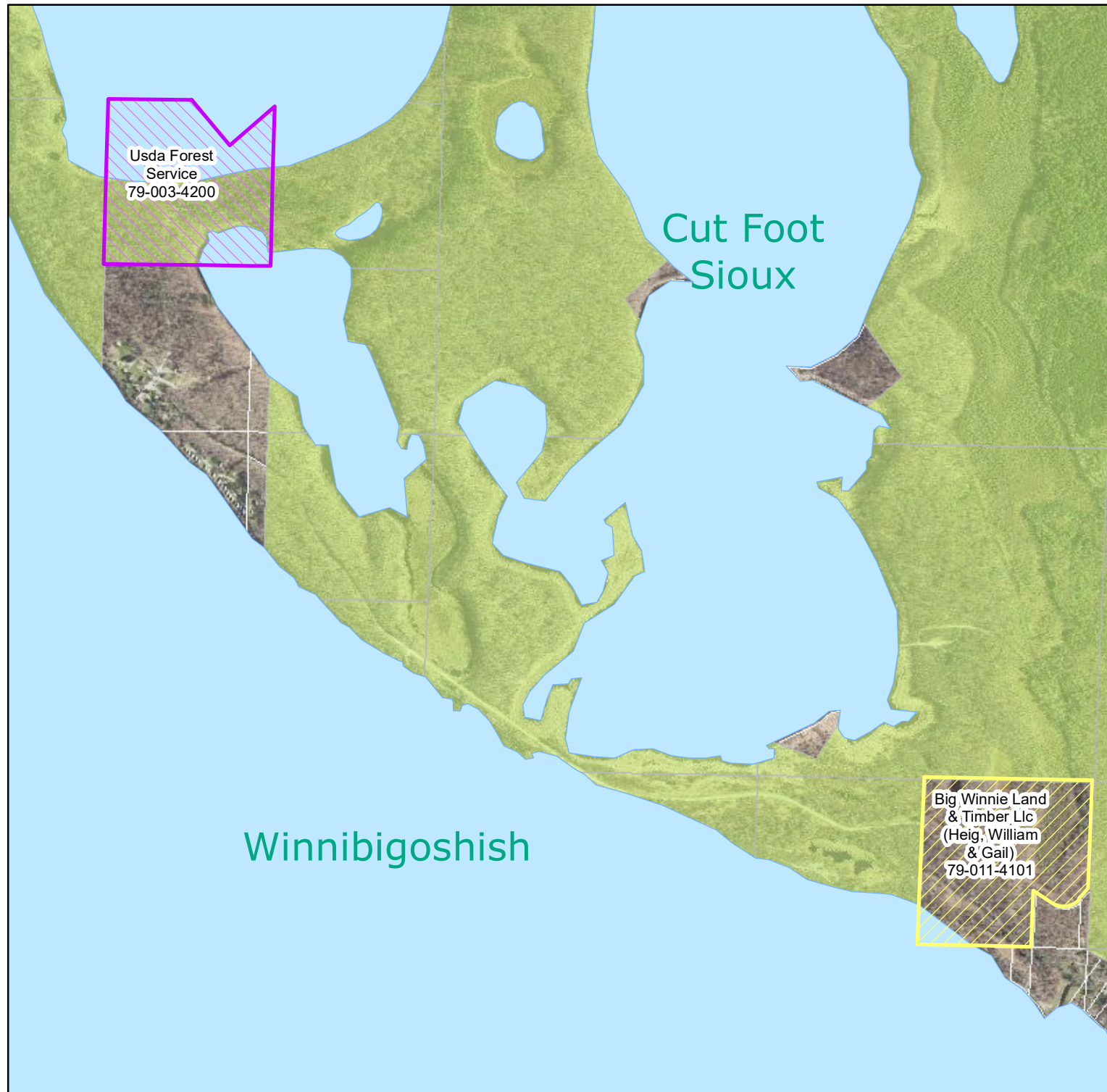
- In May 2021, a California real estate fund attempted to purchase an incredibly rare, large, and undeveloped land parcel on Lake Winnibigoshish (34 acres & 1100 feet of shoreline) which was listed for private sale. The intended use was a large-scale commercial development.
- In June 2021, Bill & Gail Heig (owners of Bowen Lodge) purchased the Lake Winnibigoshish property to prevent large-scale development on an ecologically important parcel of pristine Lake Winnibigoshish shoreline.
- July 15, 2021, A meeting was held at Bowen Lodge where representatives from Itasca County, USFS, Mississippi Headwaters Board (MHB), Itasca County Soil and Water District and other key stakeholders toured the Winnibigoshish property and discussed opportunities for its preservation, options included conservation easements, a conservation planned unit development, acquisitions, and government land exchanges.
- Consensus was USFS is the best candidate to own and maintain the land in its natural state.
- A land exchange between Bowen Lodge and USFS for the Winnibigoshish property and Cut Foot Sioux Marina Lease was recommended.

### **Key Features and Benefits of the Lake Winnibigoshish Property**

- An exchange for the Cut Foot Sioux Marina Lease would concentrate visitor and commercial activity on already disturbed land.
- USFS acquires an undisturbed and environmentally sensitive parcel on Lake Winnibigoshish; the logic of the exchange follows the USFS mission of managing undisturbed sites.
- Climax Old Growth Maple Basswood Forest – protecting the property meets the same objective as creation of the Battle Point Research Natural Area (FONSI signed June 26, 1991). ([mn\\_chippewa\\_battle\\_point.pdf \(fs.fed.us\)](https://www.fs.fed.us/mn/chippewa/battle_point.pdf))
- Preserves critical wetlands within 1000 feet of Lake Winnibigoshish and the Mississippi River.
- Property boasts a perfect Riparian, Adjacency, Quality (RAQ) score of 10/10 from the MHB, and is among only 41 of 7640 parcels to have a perfect score (10/10).
- Prime wildlife habitat that allows for rich biodiversity in migratory birds, waterfowl, and native species
- Preserves 1100 feet of shoreline from recreational, residential, and commercial development.
- Maintains the High Scenic Integrity Zone of Lake Winnibigoshish
- Critical fish rearing shoreline for muskie, northern, walleye, perch, largemouth bass and spot tail shiners.

### **Summary**

Bowen Lodge proposes an exchange with the USFS of the Cut Foot Sioux Marina Lease for the Lake Winnibigoshish property (see attached map).



# Proposed Land Exchange between Parcels 79-003-4200 & 79-011-4101

## Legend

### Select Ownership

-  BIG WINNIE LAND & TIMBER LLC
-  USDA FOREST SERVICE
-  Lake
-  US Forest Service Property
-  Tax Parcel

The aerial photograph was  
flown in Spring of 2018.



0 250 500 1,000 1,500 2,000  
Feet



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Date: 8/16/2021

Name: Heig\_ProposedLandExchange