

**Congress of the United States**  
**House of Representatives**  
**Washington, DC 20515-2308**

August 3, 2022

The Honorable Deb Haaland  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street NW  
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Tom Vilsack  
Secretary  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 20250

Dear Secretary Haaland and Secretary Vilsack:

I write today deeply disturbed by the Forest Service's proposal to ban taconite mining, along with copper, nickel, cobalt, and platinum-group element mining, in more than 225,000 acres of the Superior National Forest. As the sole Member of the House of Representatives with a district impacted by this proposal, I urge you in the strongest of terms to end this political process and reject Alternative A, or any other blanket withdrawal, that impedes access to our great mineral wealth in northern Minnesota.

**Banning Taconite**

Per the last paragraph of page 8 in the Draft Environmental Assessment (EA), Section 204 of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act does not allow a commodity-specific or activity-specific withdrawal to occur.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, by the Administration's own admission, Alternative A bans taconite mining and exploration activities, *on the Iron Range*.

Perhaps this Administration is unaware, but the Iron Range provides 80% of America's steel with a union-centric workforce.<sup>2</sup> Multiple generations of iron miners populate the Range built along our iron deposits, generating tens of millions of dollars annually in revenue for towns, schools, and economic diversification.

Arguments made by well-funded anti-mining organizations that taconite will not be affected by this withdrawal are at best, misinformed or at worst, a thinly veiled attempt at hiding the true goal of banning all mining in Minnesota, while trying to avoid the political ramifications associated with taking such a radical anti-mining position. Further, H.R. 2794, the *Boundary Waters Protection and Pollution Prevention Act*, which was marked up and passed on a partisan basis with no Republican support through the House Natural Resources Committee, contains a so-called "carveout" for taconite mining in Section 3 paragraph (d).<sup>3</sup> If there was no concern for existing taconite resources, the bill's author would not have included such a section.

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<sup>1</sup> U.S. Forest Service (2022). *Rainy River Withdrawal Environmental Assessment*  
<https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=60916>

<sup>2</sup> <https://ironrange.org/mining/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.congress.gov/bill/117th-congress/house-bill/2794/text>

The senior Senator from Minnesota, Amy Klobuchar, is also explicit in her support for taconite mining. Most recently, Senator Klobuchar's office stated in a July 22, 2022 article that "we must ensure iron ore mining is not negatively impacted by the review process."<sup>4</sup>

Eliminating the chance to explore for or develop taconite is beyond the pale, even for this Administration.

### **Ignoring Global Emissions**

By declining to consider environmental impacts on a project-by-project basis, such as the entirety of the Environmental Impact Statement offered by Twin Metals, it's apparent that this Administration is choosing to hide from an exhaustive review and instead listen, as always, to only favored constituencies.

The Draft EA notably discusses holistic impacts of climate change yet refuses to acknowledge the significantly higher emissions profiles of the nations from which we import our minerals now. It meanwhile ignores the fact that the Twin Metals project proposes to use zero-emission vehicles in lieu of diesel-powered trucks. But again, it's too inconvenient to the narrative to include details that hurt the argument made by powerful special interests.

Along with taconite, the withdrawal proposal eliminates from development a significant portion of America's clean energy mineral reserves. The Duluth Complex contains 95% of America's nickel, 88% of our cobalt, 75% of our platinum-group elements, and more than one-third of its copper.<sup>5</sup> Not having access to these domestic resources completely undermines any sort of clean energy goals. The only remaining option is to import from abroad, as your Administration also has chosen to undermine other projects in Minnesota, Arizona, and across the country.<sup>67</sup>

For an Administration who touts its environmental record, impeding domestic mining projects makes it clear this Administration prefers to import minerals from countries that mine with poor environmental standards, effectively nullifying any emissions benefits from using the imported minerals.

### **Ignoring Mining's Economic Impact**

The Labovitz School of Business and Economics at the University of Minnesota-Duluth (UMD) states that the existing mining industry in Minnesota contributes more than \$4 billion to the state's economy.<sup>8</sup> These statistics are even before any copper-nickel projects come online.

Meanwhile, UMD's Labovitz School also estimates that developing one, single ore body in the Duluth Complex would amount to a \$500 billion *annual* impact to the region. For comparison, the 2018 Super Bowl held in downtown Minneapolis amounted to a \$450 billion *one-time* impact.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.minnpost.com/environment/2022/07/tens-of-thousands-lobbied-for-and-against-mining-moratorium-in-superior-national-forest/>

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.mesabtribune.com/mine/minnesota-has-the-metals-for-ev-green-energy-conomy/article\\_810ada2c-7646-11eb-bb2c-bb7589cbe044.html](https://www.mesabtribune.com/mine/minnesota-has-the-metals-for-ev-green-energy-conomy/article_810ada2c-7646-11eb-bb2c-bb7589cbe044.html)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.duluthnewtribune.com/business/epa-recommends-army-corps-not-reissue-polymet-permit>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-mining-resolution/u-s-forest-service-rescinds-environmental-report-for-rios-arizona-copper-mine-idUSKCN2AT3JA>

<sup>8</sup>

<https://conservancy.umn.edu/bitstream/handle/11299/216463/UMD%20BBER%20Mining%20Economic%20Impact%20Report%202020.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.duluthnewtribune.com/opinion/our-view-stauber-makes-good-on-priority>

Northern Minnesota could see an annual economic impact multiple times that of a Super Bowl, as more nonferrous mining projects come online, in a region desperate for development. With economic development from mining, we see more hospitals, more schools, and further economic diversification across multiple sectors. Yet, this Administration is *choosing* to deny that opportunity to my constituents, while favored, urban constituencies like those in Minneapolis are allowed to grow and develop.

### **Ignoring Union Voices**

The proposed mineral withdrawal furthers the White House's clean energy strategy of prioritizing imports from places using child and slave labor over a domestic, union workforce. "Union" was not mentioned one, single, time throughout the entire document, although local, working families are the most impacted. Meanwhile, mere weeks ago, Biden waived tariffs on Chinese solar panels being laundered through southeast Asian countries, effectively ending an investigation into the likely use of slave labor.<sup>10</sup>

The U.S. Geological Survey time and again highlights the devastating import reliance America faces for nearly every mineral we need, with several imported directly from China, Russia, and the Congo, which are well-known adversaries of America, or at the very least, routine human rights violators.<sup>11</sup> However, it's well known that anti-mining activists that worked to support this withdrawal would rather have cheap solar panels made by slaves than domestic solar panels built with living wages, so again this was ignored by the Draft EA.

It does not have to be this way. We could have American miners with union protections constructing and operating mines right here on the Iron Range, for taconite, copper, nickel, cobalt, platinum-group elements, and more. In fact, the Twin Metals project, for example, has already signed a Project Labor Agreement with the Iron Range Building and Construction Trades, committing to domestic, union labor, with Davis-Bacon protected, fair market wages.<sup>12</sup>

After constructing the mines and extracting these minerals, the Iron Range could offer high-quality, high wage jobs, processing the minerals and refining locally. But if the resource is unavailable, siting a plant on the Iron Range, where it's desperately needed, may drive companies to build where the resources are actually accessible.

### **Ignoring Intent and Use of the Public Land**

A mineral withdrawal would also subvert the intended use of the Superior National Forest. Per the Forest Plan, mining is a desired condition.<sup>13</sup> There is already a unique buffer zone surrounding the wilderness, carefully negotiated in PL95-495. and this particular withdrawal amounts to a de facto expansion of the wilderness boundary. In 1978, then-Representative Jim Oberstar, who sat in the seat I now occupy, wrote to then-President Carter regarding the wilderness:

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.foxbusiness.com/politics/biden-foolish-solar-energy-policy-enrich-china-not-america>

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Geological Survey (2022). *Mineral Commodity Summaries 2022*

<https://pubs.usgs.gov/periodicals/mcs2022/mcs2022.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.mesabtribune.com/news/twin-metals-signs-union-construction-agreement/article\\_e2fc06b8-c484-11e9-9b71-e71b36fd02f4.html](https://www.mesabtribune.com/news/twin-metals-signs-union-construction-agreement/article_e2fc06b8-c484-11e9-9b71-e71b36fd02f4.html)

<sup>13</sup> [https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE\\_DOCUMENTS/fsm91\\_050599.pdf](https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fsm91_050599.pdf)

“... I urge you not to trade off life styles, livelihoods, and legitimate desires of the people of northeastern Minnesota for equitable treatment in favor of the vague and ill-defined interests of other, perhaps more clamorous constituencies far removed...”<sup>14</sup>

Congressman Oberstar’s words have never rang truer than today. A de facto wilderness expansion veiled as a mineral withdrawal is poor precedent, both locally and nationally. Your favored constituencies, the keep-it-in-the-ground lawyers, will build on this momentum to ban the next industry or activity they disagree with, whether it’s logging, snowmobiling, boating, or anything else.

### **Mining Activities in the Rainy River Watershed**

The central argument made in the Draft EA is that mining taconite, copper, nickel, cobalt, and other metals should be banned in order to preserve the Rainy River Watershed. However, just 40 miles north of my district and in the very same watershed sits the New Gold Rainy River Mine.<sup>15</sup> New Gold operates an open-pit nonferrous mine in the Rainy River Watershed upstream of Lake of the Woods, which is mostly located in American waters. There is no evidence that Lake of the Woods is polluted by this open pit nonferrous mine.

Guaranteeing pollution of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area by proposals to mine taconite or other precious metals is just a scare tactic. Twin Metals proposed a completely underground mine with dry stack tailings, where acid mine drainage is literally impossible.<sup>16</sup> New Gold is an operational open pit nonferrous mine and has caused no pollution in Lake of the Woods. Scare tactics should not drive public policy decisions with massive ramifications, such as taking more than 225,000 acres of minerals we desperately need for our modern world offline.

In conclusion, the White House made it clear this Administration prefers to source minerals from abroad instead of right here in northern Minnesota, where we have unparalleled mineral wealth.<sup>17</sup> While this is no longer news, every step taken to embody this philosophy of appeasing radical activists who prefer Not-In-My-Backyard policies continues to shock our mining communities, but it will not stop them.

I therefore request in the strongest of terms that you reject Alternative A in the Draft EA, or any other blanket mineral withdrawal in the Superior National Forest.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Pete Stauber", written over a horizontal line.

Pete Stauber  
Member of Congress

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<sup>14</sup> Kevin Proescholdt, Rip Rapson, Miron Heinselman, *Troubled Waters* (St. Cloud: North Star Press, 1995), 269.

<sup>15</sup> <https://newgold.com/home/default.aspx>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.duluthnewstribune.com/opinion/columns/local-view-acid-rock-drainage-a-nonissue-with-twin-metals-mine>

<sup>17</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/biden-looks-abroad-electric-vehicle-metals-blow-us-miners-2021-05-25/>