

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

May 24, 2022

Alan Lowenthal
Chairman
House Natural Resources Committee
Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee
108 Cannon House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Pete Stauber
Ranking Member
House Natural Resources Committee
Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee
461 Cannon HOB
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Lowenthal and Ranking Member Stauber,

As members of the Minnesota delegation, we strongly oppose H.R. 2794, the deeply misguided “Boundary Waters Wilderness Protection and Pollution Prevention Act.”

For over a century, Minnesotans have been mining in the Iron Range to provide the materials that built our skyscrapers, won our wars, and constructed our highway system while bringing enormous economic opportunity and critical tax revenue to our state. This industry is a key part of Minnesota’s heritage, and one our state has been able to pursue while preserving some of the cleanest and most pristine waters in the nation.

The bill that is the subject of this hearing makes a mockery of Minnesota’s mining heritage. H.R. 2794 would immediately and permanently withdraw over 200,000 acres of federal land in the Rainy River Watershed from all forms of mineral leasing or exploration. In doing so, it effectively mirrors a cynical and political withdrawal made during the last days of Obama Administration, a decision that was rightly reversed by the Trump Administration in 2018. Unfortunately, the Biden Administration, some of whose members were even part of the original Obama-era decision, has recently decided to reverse course and yet again withdraw these acres from mineral exploration.

The Rainy River Watershed is home to the Duluth Complex, one of the largest untapped mineral reserves in the world.¹ In 2019, Twin Metals Minnesota formally submitted a proposed mine plan of operation that seeks to tap into a vast deposit of copper, nickel, cobalt, and platinum group metals if approved.² H.R. 2794 would immediately and arbitrarily halt any possibility of tapping into this deposit, despite mining in the area being labeled a “desired activity” under the U.S. Forest Service’s own plan for the surrounding National Forest.³

We agree with our delegation’s senior Senator that “[the Twin Metals Project] should [be] handled through a normal process” and that “a thorough EPA review would [tell] us if it is safe or not.”⁴ Before a shovel even meets the ground, any mine plan needs to meet a stringent scientific review and adhere to bedrock environmental laws such as the National Environmental Policy Act, the Clean Air Act, and the Clean Water Act. Unfortunately, H.R. 2794 ignores the stringent environmental review process. Instead, the bill mandates a withdrawal regardless of Twin Metals’ efforts to prove to all of us what Minnesotans have known for generations: our vast resources can be extracted in a safe, environmentally sustainable manner.

¹ <http://www.miningminnesota.com/duluth-complex/>

² https://www.twin-metals.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/TMM-Mine-Plan-of-Operations_2019-1218-R.pdf

³ https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fsm91_050599.pdf

⁴ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/a-democrat-deflates-a-trump-scandal-11559862259>.

The economic consequences will be devastating – and not just for miners. Throughout the proposed withdrawal area are state lands that, under our state’s constitution, derive funds for our school systems by way of mineral extraction revenues on those lands. A withdrawal such as that proposed under H.R. 2794 and the most recent Biden Administration’s decision would eliminate billions of dollars in potential revenues to schools across the state.

We ask supporters of this bill: How do you intend to make up the shortfall? H.R. 2794 offers no answers, meaning the bill imposes an unfunded mandate borne on the backs of our students, teachers, and school administrators.

Additionally, we cannot understand why the Majority seeks to advance a bill that runs counter to the stated interests of the Biden Administration’s climate policy. Under the goals of the Paris Climate Agreement, which was rejoined by the Biden Administration and applauded by the very sponsors of this bill,⁵ the World Bank estimates that mineral production will need to increase by 450% within the next three decades to meet demands for clean energy technologies.⁶ The International Energy Administration estimates demand to rise by 40% for copper and 70% for nickel and cobalt over the next two decades in order to meet the Paris Agreement goals – all of which could be extracted from the Rainy River Watershed.

If we do not want Minnesota miners to extract these resources, we are making a decision to hand over the reins to countries like China, Russia, and the Democratic Republic of Congo instead. Does the Majority assume that those countries will have better environmental standards than we have in the United States? And can *anyone* claim with a straight face that these countries will treat their workers as well as we treat our workers in Minnesota?

We must stop this senseless attempt to destroy Minnesota jobs and compromise our state’s heritage. Economic development and environmental stewardship can easily coexist – as the residents of our state know very well. Perhaps that is why the vast majority of H.R. 2794’s supporters do not even reside in Minnesota, let alone in the withdrawal region.

On behalf of the hundreds of thousands of our constituents who believe our state knows better than bureaucrats in Washington how to responsibly manage our resources: We respectfully but firmly ask the Subcommittee to reject H.R. 2794 and allow Minnesota to chart its own path into the future.

Sincerely,



Tom Emmer
Member of Congress



Michelle Fischbach
Member of Congress

⁵ <https://twitter.com/BettyMcColum04/status/1352020463631917072?s=20&eqsbRIOgIZ4jUM-yYkQEc9w>

⁶ <http://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/961711588875536384/Minerals-for-Climates-Action-The-Mineral-Intensity-of-the-Clean-Energy-Transition.pdf>