

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 18, 2025

The Honorable Brooke Rollins  
Secretary of Agriculture  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
1400 Independence Avenue SW  
Washington, DC 20250

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

Dear Secretary Rollins and Secretary Burgum,

On June 11<sup>th</sup>, Secretary Rollins announced via social media that your work together has resulted in the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) deciding to reverse the 225,504-acre federal mineral withdrawal in the Superior National Forest. This withdrawal is crucial for protecting the clean water, unparalleled recreation opportunities, and biodiverse wildlife habitat of Minnesota's Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (Boundary Waters)—the most visited National Wilderness Area in the nation. The mineral withdrawal of the Rainy River Watershed protects the headwaters of this priceless natural treasure.

In the same post, you claimed to have reviewed the withdrawal and sought and received extensive public input. You stated, to be exact:

“Today, [@USDA](#) is proud to announce that we are initiating the process to cancel the mineral withdrawal in the Rainey [sic] River watershed on the Superior National Forest. After careful review, including extensive public input, the US Forest Service has enough information to know the withdrawal was never needed.”

As Representatives for the people of the United States and champions for the Boundary Waters – a vast reserve of some of our nation's purest water and one of our greatest outdoor treasures – we have significant concerns both the substance of this announcement and the manner in which it was communicated. Given the need for transparent and more direct communication on this matter, we are formally requesting a joint in-person meeting with you to obtain necessary information regarding the actions the USDA and Department of the Interior (DOI) intend to take related to the Superior National Forest.

We ask that you either schedule a meeting with us to discuss the following questions or provide a comprehensive written response by July 25, 2025:

1. The U.S. Forest Service conducted a detailed and extensive evaluation of the risks of copper mining in the headwaters of the Boundary Waters, resulting in the *Rainy River Withdrawal Environmental Assessment* (EA), published in June 2022, along with 20 accompanying resource reports documenting the decision to recommend a mineral withdrawal. Did you review the evidence in these documents in advance prior to concluding that “the withdrawal was never needed”? Please provide all review materials from your departments that formed the basis for that conclusion, including identification of which scientific findings in the EA and resource reports you dispute and the scientific rationale for those disputes.
2. As recently as December 18, 2024, a letter from the U.S. Forest Service Regional Forester to the Bureau of Land Management reaffirmed that, “In the 2023 mineral withdrawal application, the Forest Service concluded that potential risks from the development of base and precious metals within the watershed

would be unacceptable after considering the impacts to, and tradeoffs with, cultural, economic, and natural resource values...The underlying concerns and risks have not changed.” What concerns, risks, or potential impacts to these resources have changed in the six months between this letter and Secretary Rollins’ social media announcement? Please provide all evidence and information supporting the basis of the Forest Service’s reversal decision.

3. Secretary Rollins’ social media announcement lacks basic details supporting the claim of “extensive public input” regarding the Forest Service’s decision to cancel the mineral withdrawal. When did your agency seek and receive input from the public? Please provide a detailed list of any public meetings held on the issue of canceling the withdrawal or any requests for public input made by the U.S. Forest Service, the Bureau of Land Management, or the Departments of Agriculture and Interior after Public Land Order 7917 was issued on January 31, 2023.
4. Congressman Pete Stauber has stated that he met personally with Secretary Rollins to discuss the Boundary Waters on June 11<sup>th</sup>—the same day of the social media announcement that the mineral withdrawal was unnecessary. No other member of the Minnesota delegation or Congress seems to have received the courtesy of direct engagement from either Secretary Rollins or Secretary Burgum or even from your staff on this issue. What meetings have been conducted on this topic by USDA or DOI officials regarding the Rainy River Watershed mineral withdrawal? Please provide the dates, participants, and any related documentation of these meetings.

The people of Minnesota and Americans nationwide overwhelmingly support permanent protection for the headwaters of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. The use of an inaccurate tweet lacking substantive detail has generated confusion and concern among our constituents, who have already provided extensive public input in support of protecting the Boundary Waters through a mineral withdrawal. We ask that you provide the information requested above to clarify these concerns, either through an in-person meeting or in written communication, before any further action is taken on the Rainy River Mineral Withdrawal by either the USDA or the DOI.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your prompt response and to your response at your earliest opportunity.

Sincerely,




Betty McCollum  
Member of Congress



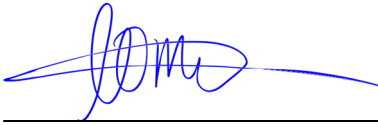
Jared Huffman  
Member of Congress  
Ranking Member, Committee on  
Natural Resources



Chellie Pingree  
Member of Congress

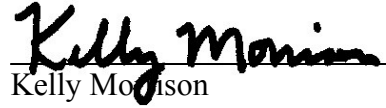


Angie Craig  
Member of Congress



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Ilhan Omar  
Member of Congress



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Kelly Morrison  
Member of Congress

cc: The Honorable Tom Schultz, Chief of the United States Forest Service