

**Unofficial Transcription of Rep. Betty McCollum and Sec. Sonny Perdue Exchange
Superior National Forest Mineral Withdrawal**

Ms. McCOLLUM: Chief Tidwell, as you know, the Superior National Forest in Minnesota is the home of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, which is a vast, interconnected network of pristine lakes and streams. This is an untarnished wilderness. It's a national treasure. The Forest Service is responsible for protecting it.

Hundreds of thousands of Americans who visit this wilderness every year are relying on your agency, as are more than 17,000 Minnesotans who work in the outdoor recreation industry in the northeastern region of our state.

And I know that the Forest Service takes this responsibility seriously, because last year the Service denied the renewal of mining leases by a foreign-owned company that, as you said, posed an "unacceptable" risk. The rejection of these lease renewals noted that a copper-nickel sulfide mining "might cause serious and irreplaceable harm to this unique, iconic, and irreplaceable wilderness."

Multiple scientific assessments have shown that these sulfide-ore mines are sources of toxic contamination and acid drainage that would cause significant harm to the waterways, aquatic life, and the forests that make the BWCA such a special place. In fact, 92 percent - 92 percent - of these sulfide-ore copper mines operating in the United States have experienced failures that impact water quality. The pictures show what recently happened in 2014 in Canada, and Canada has some of the same stringent safeguards that we try to put in place. But 92 percent of these fail.

So I really want to give a shout out to the Forest Service for the work you are currently doing with the Department of the Interior to conduct a two-year, science-based study to determine if approximately 230,000 acres of National Forest lands within the watershed of the Boundary Waters should be off-limits to sulfide-ore copper mining for the next 20 years.

Last week, the Forest Service staff confirmed with my office that you are going to have an additional public meeting in the Twin Cities regarding this mining withdrawal. People from southern Minnesota, as well as the Twin Cities are very appreciative of the Forest Service doing this. You've had several hearings in northern Minnesota, but we really appreciate the ability for the folks in the Twin Cities to go forward. So I'm assuming this meeting is going forward. I'm asking you in public.

But could you please talk about the potential consequences be for the wildlife, the waters, and the forests in the BWCA and the adjacent lands if there is a discharge, leakage or spill from a sulfide mine—all of which are common events for this industry?

And I know that you are receiving phone calls and that you are receiving pressure from the mining industry. We have a rich tradition of mining in Minnesota and this is the only mining in Minnesota I've come out forcefully against, in part because of its location in the watershed.

So could you please enlighten us on what you, and I'm going to include you Mr. Secretary, what you two gentlemen can do to ensure that this proposed study goes forward as planned so that we can have

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robust public participation, grounded in science and figuring out how to best preserve this pristine wilderness when 92 percent - even here in the United States - of these mines fail. And Mr. Perdue, I think you've seen what happened in Canada.

Mr. PERDUE: Well, you've addressed your questions to him, if I may precede him in that because as I've said earlier, the buck stops here. I'm the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture and the U.S. Forest Service is under the Secretary of Agriculture. While we have a Chief Forester who knows the history of this and can address those specific questions, I want you to know that this is on my radar screen as well.

Secretary Zinke and I have already met about this and I think your statement there regarding the two-year study over the sound science. None of us, I'm not smart enough to know what to do without the facts base and the sound science, and we are absolutely allowing that to proceed.

You also know that your state has a shot at that after that recommendation, as well. So we are determined to proceed in that effort and let it run its course. No decision will be made prior to the conclusion of that.

Ms. McCOLLUM: Well, thank you. Governor Dayton will be excited to hear that.

Mr. PERDUE: He's already well aware of his roles and responsibilities in that effort.

Ms. McCOLLUM: Well he's taken the state lands off. Thank you.

Mr. TIDWELL: Well, the only thing I would add is that the study allows us to really pull together the information, the data and look at the overall balance.

Mining is an essential part of multiple-use. It's especially very important in your state, it's also essential for this country. And we can have mining operations that are safe, environmentally safe. We have many that have proven to be able to do that that.

You do raise the question about the sulfide-ore. That is more challenging, especially in areas where we have as much water as we do up in that part of the state.

So this gives a chance to be able to pause, collect the information, to be able to visit, and really meet with the public. And it's more to be able to take comments. We just want to be able to sit down with them and really hear from their concerns.

And then as we move forward, to find that balance. The balance where mining needs to occur and it can be done in a safe, environmental way. And then if decisions need to be made for other areas, that it's just potentially maybe too hazardous, then those are the types of decisions that can come out of this study.

Ms. McCOLLUM: Well I thank you gentlemen for your comments and I thank you for your reassurance to let the two-year study go forward.

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Mr. PERDUE: Let me give you maybe a principle that may help your feelings that way. While our motto is “do right and feed everyone,” as a veterinarian, I also ascribe to the Hippocratic Oath: “first of all, do no harm.” And we hear you loud and clear.

Ms. McCOLLUM: Thank you, sir.