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February 3, 2021

The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
President of the United States of America
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Biden:

As your administration begins to restore the American people's trust in our federal government, we share the priority of ensuring that government policies and decisions about America's public lands are rooted in sound science and the public good. Under the previous administration, there was an extreme politicization of these decisions and a push to exploit our nation's natural resources by private interests, without regard to sound science or the long-term environmental consequences.

The American people deserve a federal government that works to protect our public lands on their behalf, not one that pushes policies on behalf of corporate interests or to curry political favor. I look forward to engaging with your senior policy staff in the White House and the relevant departments to ensure protections for one of our country's most precious federal treasures: the 1.1 million-acre Boundary Waters Canoe Area (BWCA) Wilderness in Northeastern Minnesota. With more than 2,000 pristine lakes and interconnecting rivers, the BWCA is at the heart of the Superior National Forest's priceless clean water supply, which provides over twenty percent of the fresh water in our entire National Forest system.

Under the Obama-Biden Administration, the former Forest Service Chief, Thomas Tidwell, issued a record of decision denying consent for the renewal of two expired mineral leases in the Superior National Forest and within the watershed of the BWCA Wilderness. This denial of consent was based on scientific evidence that a sulfide-ore copper mine within the Rainy River Watershed posed an unacceptable risk of "harm to this unique, iconic, and irreplaceable wilderness area." The Forest Service subsequently applied for a mineral withdrawal of federal lands within the Rainy River Watershed, which launched a two-year mineral segregation and a deliberative, science-based environmental review.

The Trump Administration overturned these decisions, without any scientific evidence to justify its actions, and instead allowed corporate and political influence to drive forward plans to mine

in this pristine and vulnerable area – threatening waters in both the U.S. and Canada.

After the previous administration abruptly abandoned and cancelled the Rainy River Watershed mineral withdrawal, I introduced bipartisan legislation (H.R. 5598) in the 116th Congress to permanently withdraw those 234,328 acres of land and minerals in the Superior National Forest. The *Boundary Waters Wilderness Protection and Pollution Prevention Act* passed the House Natural Resources Committee last year, and I will be reintroducing this legislation in the 117th Congress.

While I work to advance these protections through the legislative process, I urge you to take immediate action to direct the Department of the Interior, Department of Agriculture, and Department of Justice to carefully review the actions, opinions, and agenda undertaken by the Trump Administration to expedite mining in this vulnerable watershed for any improper influence or unsupported decisions. Many of these actions are currently being challenged in court, and I ask your administration to pause any defense of them or further leasing and permitting activity until they have been thoroughly reviewed.

Furthermore, I strongly encourage your administration to direct the Forest Service to initiate a new application for a 20-year mineral withdrawal of the 234,328 acres within the Superior National Forest, in order to complete the comprehensive environmental review begun under the Obama-Biden administration. This review was abruptly cancelled by the previous administration's Secretary of Agriculture only months before completion. Your administration can restore this essential, science-based process to the federal government's decisions on mining activity within this unique and vulnerable ecosystem by integrating the work already begun during the cancelled environmental review with any new public comments and updated scientific analysis to produce a final environmental assessment and recommendation for the future of these public lands in the Superior National Forest.

Mr. President, permanently protecting the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, our nation's most visited wilderness, is critical to an agenda that prioritizes climate action, biodiversity preservation, clean water protection, and environmental justice. I am proud to join with Native American leaders, conservation and environmental organizations, and millions of Americans who are not willing to risk toxic mining poisoning the BWCA Wilderness.

For Americans today and tomorrow, I look forward to working with your administration to permanently protect the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.

Sincerely,



Betty McCollum
Member of Congress