

Rep. Betty McCollum Interior Appropriations Listening Session, Feb. 24, 2020
Comments submitted by Tom Landwehr, Executive Director, Northeastern Minnesotans for
Wilderness

Rep. McCollum and staff. Thank you for the opportunity to provide input to the Interior Appropriations process. I am Tom Landwehr, the Executive Director of Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness, home of the Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters. Our organization works to protect America's most-visited wilderness from degradation, and are currently focused on preventing the development of the Twin Metals mine adjacent the Boundary Waters and in its watershed. We are very appreciative of the outstanding leadership Rep. McCollum has demonstrated on this issue; we are hopeful the rest of the Minnesota delegation follows her lead.

There are two aspects of Interior Appropriations I would like to discuss, and suspect most Minnesotans are unaware of the significance they play in our quality of life.

The first aspect of Interior Appropriations I'd highlight is operating funding for 4 important agencies. These agencies play a critical role in safeguarding our environment and quality of life.

1. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Growing up in St. Paul, I could tell if the wind was coming from the north, west or south. If from the north, the Koch refinery on Pierce Butler Road would regularly emit stifling sulfurous smells that lasted for hours. If from the west, I could smell the Mississippi River where all the sewage was dumped. And if from the south, I could smell the offal from the stockyards. We have come a long way in 50 years, and it is thanks to the Clean Water Act and Clean Air Act, both administered by the EPA. With the significant damage the Trump administration is doing to the Clean Water Act and the gutting of regulatory agencies, it is critical we fully fund the operating budget of this vital agency. We need more people on the ground keeping our air and water clean; we don't want to go backwards.
2. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). With a devastating loss of habitat and the ubiquitous use of pesticides, many of our migratory bird populations are on the verge of extirpation. Similarly, migratory species like the Monarch Butterfly and northern long-eared bat are experiencing catastrophic declines. We have entrusted the conservation of these species to the Fish and Wildlife Service, and they are chronically underfunded. They also manage 13 National Wildlife Refuges and hundreds of Waterfowl Production Areas, sites that in many cases are the only habitat for miles around. FWS is like our Noah's Ark, and we need to make sure they can continue to keep the boat afloat.
3. Forest Service (USFS). Minnesota is fortunate to have 2 large National Forests - the Chippewa and the Superior National Forest - the latter which also hosts the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. These are magnificent landscapes that Minnesotans use and enjoy year round, not just for recreation but for timber production and the multi-billion dollar tourist industry. But it takes people and resources to do this management, and this is another agency that is chronically underfunded. Please help keep these the gems they are by ensuring there are enough staff to do the job.

4. National Park Service (NPS). The Park Service manages Voyageurs National Park, the Mississippi River Recreation Area and the St. Croix Wild and Scenic River. We are a state blessed with water resources, and these amazing areas are superb examples of our natural heritage. These are immensely popular, which puts additional stress on them. Please help keep them intact for our children and grandchildren.

The second area of the Interior Appropriations budget I'd mention briefly is appropriations from the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF). LWCF gets its money from offshore oil leases - it is a way to pay citizens back for the extraction and sale of our shared resources. The funds are supposed to go to land conservation - especially the purchase and management of important public lands. As you know, the LWCF has never received the funding it is owed, and there is a backlog of projects needing those dollars. For instance, here in Minnesota, the Forest Service and MN DNR have been working for years to sell state lands in the BWCAW to the federal government. These are school trust lands and the project the agencies are working on would provide dollars into the permanent school fund. The biggest obstacle at this point is dollars for the federal government to make the purchase. A fully funded LWCF could help make that happen much more quickly.

In closing, we are so fortunate that you are the chair of the Interior Appropriations Committee. You care about our natural world and you have the standing to make it better. Thank you for listening to our concerns.

Tom Landwehr, Executive Director
Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness and the Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters
807 Broadway St. NE
Minneapolis, MN 55413