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Testimony regarding withdrawal of National Forest System lands in northern Minnesota from
disposition under the United States mineral and geothermal leasing laws
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND MINERAL RESOURCES
HOUSE COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
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Good morning, Mr. Chairman, and Members of the Subcommittee.

My name is Harvey Thorleifson. I am a University of Minnesota Professor, and I hold degrees in geoscience and biology.

My first employment in science was in aquatic ecology, and much of my career has focused on protection of water.

I also have engaged in research to support the mining industry, and I have held leadership positions, such as chair of the state mining society.

At present, I am chair of the Minnesota Center for Mineral Resource Education, which seeks to share balanced information with the public.

I believe that we all want the same thing, for people to be healthy, wealthy, and safe, while protecting our human and natural heritage.

We thus need services, infrastructure, food, energy, water, and minerals, including materials needed for national security and green energy.

But, as for other industries, past little-regulated mining left a legacy of landscape modification and pollution that we no longer tolerate.

And although mining technology has advanced, we still are disturbed when we hear of tailings dam failures, or acid drainage.

We are committed to reduce, reuse, and recycle, but that is not enough, we still need to mine, somewhere.

Reliance on imports makes us vulnerable to supply, causes lost jobs and revenue, and condones labor and environmental practices overseas.

We therefore benefit from domestic mining that fully satisfies all rigorous regulatory requirements.

In Minnesota, we value our clean air and water, we treasure our landscape, and we have benefited from industries.

Mining is part of the Minnesota way of life, whether sand and gravel or crushed stone in every County, or iron ore for the needs of the Nation.

To the north in Canada are multiple major sulfide mines that produce needed metals that we import to the US.

The Minnesota Legislature has endorsed responsible mineral diversification, and companies have been urged to explore and invest.

The Duluth Complex north and west of Lake Superior thus has been recognized as a potential source of metals, including critical minerals.

New mining offers the opportunity for thousands of jobs for Minnesota families, much revenue, and decreased reliance on imports to the US.

However, the people of Minnesota will not tolerate what they deem to be unacceptable risk, such as the potential for significant pollution of water.

Counties and Tribes in the north want to protect all waters, and today we are focused on the Boundary Waters in the upper Rainy River basin.

Concern has been expressed regarding the potential for new mining in an area that drains to the Rainy River.

There has been mining in this drainage, and activity presumably discharges wastewater, but concern relates to acid-generating sulfide minerals.

The project that has been proposed would have no headframe, no smelter, no smokestack, no waste rock, no tailings pond, nor tailings dam.

It thus is difficult to reconcile the level of public concern with the project as described.

Mining in this watershed thus could result in jobs, and metals needed by the Nation, with a much lower chance of pollution than past mining.

I urge those who seek to facilitate or prevent this mining to more explicitly describe the pollution that could plausibly occur.

There is clear support to protect the Boundary Waters, either from significant pollution or any pollution, and no doubt people of Counties and Tribes who live in other watersheds yearn for a similar level of protection.

I have appreciated this opportunity to testify. Thank-you.