

David J. Tomassoni

State Senator - District 6

President Pro Tem

Chair - Higher Education Finance & Policy Committee



Senate

State of Minnesota

January 4, 2022

Bureau of Land Management Eastern States Office
RE: Superior National Forest Withdrawal Application
5275 Leesburg Pike
Falls Church, Virginia 22041

Bureau of Land Management:

We are in strong opposition to the recent federal actions instituting a two-year prohibition on new mining permits and a generic study that could lead to a 20-year withdrawal of certain national forest lands from disposition under the mineral leasing laws. Our collective districts represent the communities in northeast Minnesota where mining has supported our economy for generations, and we are deeply concerned these actions will have significant negative impacts to the residents of our region and beyond.

These actions will not provide valuable information for the public. Regulatory agencies should follow the long-established process to evaluate each project on its merits, specific to individual leases, geologic deposit makeup, mining methods, and other scientific considerations. No two proposals are the same and should not be measured as such. The Forest Service has stated previously that generic environmental reviews are ineffective. The best answers will come from letting regulatory experts do their jobs to transparently consider and measure each unique development opportunity. Further, this withdrawal of federal minerals from future development would be unnecessary and unlawful. The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness has strict protections in place within its boundaries as well as the surrounding buffer zones where mining is prohibited. Pursuing mineral withdrawal ignores the established process for the public to evaluate mining projects on their merits.

Imposing a 20-year moratorium on development of these minerals would run directly counter to the Biden administration's commitment to address the climate crisis, shore up domestic supply chains and bolster job opportunities for our constituents and our nation.

The World Bank estimates that mining more than three billion ton of minerals and metals the world needs by 2050 is the only path to limiting global warming by 2°C or less. The organization projects astronomical increases in demand for copper, nickel, cobalt and other strategic minerals, and we cannot meet the demand for a more electric, carbon-free future without the minerals in our region. The Duluth Complex geologic formation in northeast Minnesota holds approximately 95% of U.S. nickel resources, 88% of its cobalt, 75% of platinum group metals and about a third of our nation's copper. Shutting off this domestic source of critical minerals is counterproductive to achieving our public policy initiatives.

Rather than continuing to outsource our aspirations to foreign countries, we should instead lead this effort at home with the highest standards for environmental and worker protection. Minnesota provided the steel that won World War II, and it is ready to help tackle the global climate crisis.

In addition, under Minnesota's constitution and statutes, the Minnesota DNR is responsible for managing approximately 2.5 million acres of school and university trust lands and an additional one million acres of mineral rights. Minnesota's mineral interests include extensive holdings located within the Superior National Forest and the Rainy River Watershed, much of which is trust minerals. There are approximately 399,500 acres of school trust minerals located inside of the Superior National Forest and outside of the BWCAW. This proposed withdrawal hurts our schools and communities long into the future by chilling investment in the region and taking development opportunities on trust land off the table.

Due to project-specific scientific records, modern technology, and global industry best practices, we believe non-ferrous mining can be done safely and responsibly while protecting the environment. It is not an either/or proposition. Rather, the regulatory process in place is set up to thoroughly examine all details of a new mining proposal to determine if it can meet our high standards for non-ferrous mining; otherwise, it will not be allowed to proceed. What mining opponents fail to recognize is that every project must be assessed through this process based on the specifics of the proposed project, its surrounding environment and the project's unique geology. Instead, they paint fictitious, fear-based pictures of what non-ferrous mining could look like without any evidence or science to back it up. Halting future developments in this region because of that fear will guarantee the loss of billions of dollars in potential revenues to support K-12 education across the state, as well as thousands of prospective jobs from future mining projects and associated spinoff employment. This action is devastating news for our economic wellbeing.

Mining has sustained our communities in northeast Minnesota for more than 130 years, and we believe it is critical that we advance the non-ferrous mining industry so to continue to support our region and become leaders in the development of the resources needed to address our most pressing issues. We believe firmly that we have a duty to extract these mineral resources in a safe and sustainable manner rather than continuing to rely on foreign sources to provide the materials our nation needs, because we can do it right in the state of Minnesota under our extraordinary worker and environmental standards.

As longtime advocates for a responsible mining industry in Minnesota, we strongly oppose this federal withdrawal.

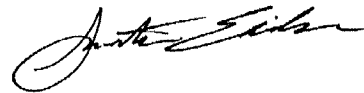
Respectfully,



David J. Tomassoni
State Senator



Thomas M. Bakk
State Senator



Justin Eichorn
State Senator



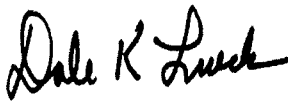
David Lislegard
State Representative



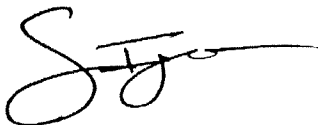
Rob Ecklund
State Representative



Julie Sandstede
State Representative



Dale Lueck
State Representative



Spencer Igo
State Representative

DT:lb