

Commissioner Cory Smith, Itasca County
House Natural Resources Committee, Federal Lands Subcommittee
Testimony on H.R. 1657, the Lake Winnibigoshish Land Exchange Act of 2023
September 19, 2023

Chairman Tiffany, Ranking Member Neguse, and members of the subcommittee, thank you for allowing me the opportunity to testify today.

My name is Cory Smith, and I serve as a County Commissioner representing the citizens of Itasca County in Northern Minnesota, home to the Chippewa National Forest and Lake Winnibigoshish.

I want to thank Representative Stauber for introducing H.R. 1657, the Lake Winnibigoshish Land Exchange Act for 2023, along with Ranking Member Neguse and Rep. Huffman for their co-sponsorship of this bill.

This land exchange bill will transfer 13.8 acres along Lake Winnibigoshish to the owners of Bowen Lodge, which is a fishing and hunting resort that has played an important role in our community since 1982. This transfer will ensure 1,640 feet of shoreline and permanent access to the lake for recreation. In return, Bowen Lodge would transfer 38 acres of land to the U.S. Forest Service, to be added to the Chippewa National Forest. Transferring this acreage to the Chippewa National Forest will allow greater management of the land, and ensuring the public has the best access to recreate and enjoy our beautiful natural resources.

Bowen Lodge is third-generation family-owned resort, dating back to 1925. The Heig family, which operate the lodge today, have done so for over 40 years. Over those three generations this family continues to be stewards of the land. From their state-of-the-art septic system to their shoreline improvements, they've taken strides to protect the health of Lake Winnibigoshish and the landscape around them.

Bowen Lodge has had an impact on so many other resorts on the lake as well, and that is one of the reasons Lake Winnibigoshish continues to thrive. On a local level there is nothing but support for this land exchange. As a community leader I would like to again express that the Heig family and Bowen Lodge has gone above and beyond for all Minnesotans when comes to taking care of Lake Winnibigoshish and the Chippewa National Forest that surrounds them.

Not only an elected official in Itasca County, but also as a local resident that is raising my family and growing a business in the area, I feel the time is now to complete this land exchange. It is an absolute win-win for everyone.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify on this bill today, which I firmly believe will benefit the citizens of Itasca County and ensure greater access to countless Minnesotans who seek to recreate along Lake Winnibigoshish. I look forward to answering your questions.