
File Code: 1950; 5400
Date: July 28, 2017

Dear Interested Individuals, Organizations and Governments:

Thank you for your interest and participation in the environmental review process for the School Trust Land Exchange. We have prepared a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for this proposed land exchange. The Draft EIS is available for your review and comment as described below.

In the School Trust Land Exchange, the Forest Service would acquire approximately 31,000 acres of Minnesota School Trust lands in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW). In exchange, the Forest Service would convey federal lands on the Superior National Forest outside the BWCAW. The amount of federal lands conveyed would be equal in value to the acquired lands and would be selected from a pool of federal candidate parcels of up to approximately 39,000 acres.

The Draft EIS describes and analyzes the environmental effects of three alternatives, including a “no action” alternative, a modification of the alternative provided for public scoping in 2015, and an alternative that addresses the issue of differences between Forest Service management policies for national forest lands and Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MDNR) management policies for School Trust lands. The decision to be made is whether to authorize an exchange and if an exchange is authorized, which lands will be exchanged and under what conditions.

This land exchange is part of a cooperative effort between the State of Minnesota and the Forest Service to transfer ownership, by a combination of exchange and purchase, of a total of approximately 83,000 acres of State-owned School Trust lands located within the boundaries of the BWCAW. The proposed transfer would be mutually beneficial to the State and to the Forest Service in meeting land management objectives.

We are currently inviting public comment on the Draft EIS. Public comments should focus on any interests or concerns a commenter has about the analysis or alternatives documented in the Draft EIS. Comments that meet the requirements of 36 CFR 218.25(a)(3) must be received 60 days from the date of publication of the Notice of Availability in the Federal Register to establish standing for the objection period that will follow release of the Draft Record of Decision. The Notice of Availability is anticipated for publication in the Federal Register on August 11, 2017.

The Draft EIS is available on the Superior National Forest’s website at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/Superior/SchoolTrustLandExchange>. The project website also includes appendices and maps of the lands proposed for exchange. An online mapping interface, ArcGIS Online, which can be used to display resources located on the lands proposed for exchange, is at <https://www.fs.usda.gov/goto/Superior/SchoolTrustLandExchange/InteractiveMap>



Comments may be submitted by the following methods. Please include in the subject line “Comment on School Trust Land Exchange Draft EIS.”

Email to: comments-eastern-superior@fs.fed.us

Send comments by post or hand delivery to: re: School Trust Land Exchange, Superior National Forest Headquarters, 8901 Grand Avenue Place, Duluth, MN 55808

Fax to: 218-626-4398

Comments received in response to this solicitation, including names and addresses of those who comment, will become part of the public record for this proposed action. Those who comment will be notified of the availability of the Final EIS and Draft Record of Decision, which will be prepared after comments are considered. If I do not hear from you, your name will be removed from the project mailing list.

The Forest Service has also scheduled three open houses where the public can learn more about the project. The open houses will feature informational displays and Forest Service staff will be available to answer questions. There will be no presentation or public speaking session, and there will be no opportunity to have verbal comments recorded. Attendees are welcome to submit written comments at the open houses. The dates and locations of the open houses are:

August 28, 4:00 pm to 7:30 pm

Denfield High School (Commons)
401 N 44th Ave W, Duluth, MN 55807

September 5, 4:00 pm to 7:30 pm

Mt. Iron Community Center
8586 Enterprise Drive S; Mountain Iron, Minnesota 55768.

September 7, 5:00 pm to 8:00 pm

MN DNR Headquarters (Lobby and adjoin meeting room)
500 Lafayette Rd, St Paul, MN 55101

I realize there are a wide range of divergent opinions about how to address the issue of School Trust lands inside the BWCAW. Your input is invaluable to me as we consider this land exchange, and I look forward to hearing from you.

If you have any questions, please contact Peter Taylor, project manager, at prtaylor@fs.fed.us or 218-626-4368.

Sincerely,

/s/Constance Cummins
CONSTANCE CUMMINS
Forest Supervisor