

Statement of Christopher French, Deputy Chief, National Forest System
USDA Forest Service
Before
The House Natural Resources Committee, Subcommittee on Energy and Minerals
On
H.R. 5598, Boundary Waters Wilderness Protection and Pollution Prevention Act
February 5, 2020

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to discuss H.R. 5598, the Boundary Waters Wilderness Protection and Pollution Prevention Act.

H.R. 5598 would withdraw 234,328 acres of National Forest System lands on the Superior National Forest within the Rainy River Watershed from all forms of entry, appropriation, and disposal under the public land laws; location, entry and patent under the mining laws, and operation of the mineral leasing, mineral materials, and geothermal leasing laws subject to valid existing rights and certain exemptions. The bill would allow the Forest Service to permit removal of sand, gravel, granite, iron ore, and taconite under certain conditions. The bill would also automatically withdraw any land or interest in lands acquired within the area in the future.

The Administration opposes the proposed withdrawal in H.R. 5598. The Administration supports the President's vision to balance conservation strategies and policies with the need to produce minerals that add value to the lives of all Americans. Domestic mineral production benefits the American economy by providing families with good paying jobs, businesses with economic opportunity, and manufacturers with raw materials that are produced at home, decreasing our reliance on foreign countries. Additionally, the laws applicable to the Superior National Forest allow for a case-by-case approach that can ensure adequate review of future lease offerings, so the legislative withdrawal is not necessary. Issuance of new Federal mineral leases in the Superior National Forest would require USDA consent, as the surface management agency, and as an expression of that consent, USDA provides surface use stipulations for any leases to be granted. The USDA is confident these processes will

preserve the high-quality fishing, wildlife viewing, and recreational opportunities Minnesotans and visitors from around the world enjoy in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.

USDA remains committed to ensuring that the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness retains its natural beauty and recreational benefits while at the same time ensuring economic opportunities outside of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness, can create jobs and increase wealth for Minnesota communities.

That concludes my testimony, Mister Chairman. I would be happy to answer any questions you or the Subcommittee members have for me.