

**STATEMENT of
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FOREST SERVICE
Submitted to
THE HOUSE NATURAL RESOURCES COMMITTEE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FEDERAL LANDS
on
H.R. 3115**

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to present a statement regarding H.R. 3115, a bill to provide for a land exchange involving Federal land within the Superior National Forest in Minnesota.

The Forest Service supports domestic energy and mineral production as an important use of the National Forest System. Mining is an important source of jobs and can be a driver of local economies, especially in rural America. The agency seeks to manage domestic energy and mineral production activities in balance with the other natural resources, values, and economic drivers found on and around the national forests.

The NorthMet Mining Project and Land Exchange involves development of a copper-nickel-platinum mine on privately held mineral rights that would affect surface National Forest System lands. In this decision, the Forest Service agreed to exchange the affected National Forest System lands with lands PolyMet Mining, Inc. owns or will own.

On January 9, 2017 the U.S. Forest Service signed the Final Record of Decision authorizing a land exchange with PolyMet Mining, Inc. The decision calls for the Forest Service to convey 6,650 acres of federal land in exchange for acquisition of 6,690 acres of non-federal lands. This decision will transfer the surface property owned by the Forest Service to PolyMet Mining, Inc., which controls the mineral rights, thereby enabling the development of the proposed mine, pending other federal and state required approvals.

This decision followed the thorough environmental analysis and public engagement process of the NorthMet Mining Project and Land Exchange, which was analyzed in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) developed by three co-lead agencies: the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources; the US Army Corps of Engineers; and the Forest Service. The EIS disclosed the environmental effects of the mining proposal and proposed land exchange. The decision-making and implementation processes within each co-lead agency are independent; the Forest Service decision is solely on the proposed land exchange. The public submitted approximately 58,000 comments on the Supplemental Draft EIS for the proposed mine and land exchange before the final EIS was released in late 2013.

H.R. 3115 would authorize and direct the land exchange detailed in the Record of Decision from January 2017. This legislation would also require the use of the values from the appraisal

conducted by the agency and approved by the Secretary of Agriculture in 2015, and provide for the voluntary waiver of the equalization payment by PolyMet Mining, Inc.

The Forest Service has been diligently working towards completing the land exchange and supports continuing to do so administratively. Because H.R. 3115 correlates with the work that is currently underway, USDA is also supportive of the legislation.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to provide this statement. The Forest Service stands ready to continue working with you on this important legislation.