



## Position Statement on Minnesota School Trust Lands in the BWCAW

The Save Lake Superior Association (SLSA), Friends of the Cloquet Valley State Forest (FCVSF), and Save Our Sky Blue Waters (SOS Blue Waters) of northeast Minnesota wish to go on record in support of a full land sale of remaining state school lands within the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness to the Federal government.

### **History**

When Minnesota became a state in 1858, the Federal government granted sections 16 and 36 of every township to the state to be held in trust for the benefit of schools. The state could use, lease, or sell the land to raise money for education.

The Minnesota Constitution established the Permanent School Fund (PSF) to ensure a long-term source of funds for public education, consisting of the accumulated revenues generated from the land; only interest from the fund can be used on a yearly basis. The Department of Natural Resources (DNR) was given responsibility for managing school trust land. The amount of school trust land peaked at 8.1 million acres, with the addition of swampland and other land grants.

Much of the land was sold by the mid 1880's. The same is true for school trust lands throughout the Midwest and eastern sections of the United States. The current state legislative agenda to extract as much money as possible from Minnesota's remaining school trust lands, and to remove school trust lands from sound management policies, comes at the expense of the integrity of the Superior National Forest and the outdoor heritage of the state.

The original school trust lands were set aside more than 150 years ago. This took place before the great timber lands were decimated, and before mining appeared on the horizon of northeastern Minnesota. This also took place at a time of many small rural one-room school houses. The legislators of today are seeking to exploit our remaining school trust lands to the maximum extent in order to fund a large sprawling urban, suburban public school system.

### **Special significance of BWCAW inholdings**

When the boundaries of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness were established, as part of the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the Boundary Waters Wilderness Act of 1978, roughly 100,000 acres of state land remained within those boundaries. There remains approximately 86,000 acres of school trust land inholdings in the BWCAW, because no logging or mining is allowed within the wilderness, this has limited revenue generation for the school trust fund. Also note that approximately 22,000 of these acres are swampland additions and were not meant to generate funds for the school trust.

The northeast Minnesota "Range" delegation has worked to prevent the sale of these state lands to the Federal government. Instead the Range delegation wants a land-exchange. Because the lands within the designated wilderness of the BWCAW are highly valued, a greater number of acres outside of the BWCAW would be needed as part of an exchange. These lands would come out of the Superior National Forest.

In the 1990's, the Range delegation sought an exchange that would allow the state to do more intensive logging on lands that border the BWCAW. But promises of a new windfall have united the Republican-led Minnesota legislature and Range Democrats. Mining companies are exploring for copper, nickel, and other trace metals in the Duluth Complex of mineralization that underlies Superior National Forest and borders the BWCAW.

### **Problematic footprint of sulfide mining**

Mineral prospecting and proposed mining of the low-grade, highly disseminated mineralization of the area is controversial. Because the ore body is so low grade, mining would result in 99% waste rock; open pits, waste rock piles, dikes and tailings basins would replace the forests and wetlands of Superior National Forest. Sulfides in the waste rock and tailings would react with air and water to eventually form sulfuric acid (H<sub>2</sub>SO<sub>4</sub>). Acid mine drainage (AMD) and leaching of unrecoverable heavy metals in the waste rock and tailings would contaminate ground and surface water flowing into two watersheds: east into Lake Superior or north into the BWCAW and the Rainy River. AMD would require near-perpetual treatment, for centuries. Even so, it is impossible to prevent the leaking of tailings basins, run-off from waste rock piles, and toxicity of open pits.

### **Legacy of mining**

The legacy of Superior National Forest and the BWCAW, lands currently protected and preserved for the citizens of this nation, would be lost to an industrial wasteland. Expansion of proposed taconite mining on the Iron Range, in conjunction with proposed sulfide mining in what is now Superior National Forest, would destroy the heritage that is currently being held in trust for our children and future generations.

### **Legacy of the trust**

The school trust lands currently within the BWCAW do not need to be traded. They could be sold directly to the Federal government; funds are available from the Land and Water Conservation Fund or other funds. Because the land within the BWCAW is highly valued, it could be sold at a high price, immediately adding money to the PSF. Even though current interest rates may be low, the amount of money added to the fund would generate significant funding. In addition, the state may be able to find ways to generate additional moneys through recreational fees, as is done in Montana.

A land sale will preserve both the legacy of the school trust fund, and the legacy of the Superior National Forest.

### **Ethics**

SLSA, FCVSF, and SOS Blue Waters believe that it is unethical and immoral to base the education of our school children upon the destruction of the land that is their true heritage.

In addition, there is no guarantee that sulfide mining will be deemed environmentally acceptable in northeast Minnesota, or that the market will sustain the mining of less than 1% ores. There has been no public discussion regarding the outsourcing of these metals to China and other countries, along with the outsourcing of profits by foreign mining companies.

Also, any land exchange would cover only the surface rights, not the mineral rights to the land within the BWCAW. This oversight could eventually hold the door open for mining within the BWCAW itself, something currently restricted by law. There is no mention being made of who would ultimately be responsible for mining clean-up costs or the costs of near perpetual treatment on school trust lands.

Legislators have jumped on a bandwagon that promises jobs and trust fund moneys, while burying the true impacts upon the land and its sustainability, water as a precious resource, the health of all of us who depend upon clean air and water, and the wilderness heritage of northeast Minnesota that remains as a vestige of what once covered this state and country.

**Summary**

SLSA, FCVSF, and SOS Blue Waters ask our Federal legislators to facilitate a total land sale of the remaining state inholdings within the BWCAW to the Federal government. We oppose any type of land exchange or partial land exchange as against the best interests of the school children of the state of Minnesota, and the future generations of this state and nation.

We believe in the importance of public education, and that it be funded through a steady and reliable source of income. Public education should not be dependent upon mining which has never before been permitted in this state, and which, if permitted, would be susceptible to market fluctuations, and which would ultimately degrade the environment for all future generations.

According to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, “Forests are the lungs of our land, purifying the air and giving fresh strength to our people.” Our school children deserve this kind of heritage.

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Save Our Sky Blue Waters [www.sosbluewaters.org](http://www.sosbluewaters.org)

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