

## Fact Sheet – Rep. Chip Cravaack Federal Lands Exchange Legislation<sup>1</sup> Bill (HR 5544) Would Allow Exploitation of the Superior National Forest as a Sulfide-Mining District

### Summary:

Congressman Cravaack's bill in the U.S. House (HR 5544) mandates a transfer of Superior National Forest lands to the State. The purpose of the Forest lands exchange is reflected in Minnesota Rep. David Dill's comments on the exchange plan: **"We should mine, log, and lease the hell out of that land that we get in the exchange."**

Cravaack's bill would convert Superior National Forest land that has been preserved since 1909 for the community — including local businesses, hunters, fisherman, tribal members, and campers — into a large sulfide-mining district that would pollute our land and waters forever.



**BEFORE – Superior National Forest**



**AFTER – Sulfide-Mining District (MN-LTV)**

### What lands would Cravaack's bill affect?

Rep. Cravaack's bill would require an exchange of approximately 86,000 acres of "School Trust Lands" within the Boundary Waters for an undetermined number of acres of Superior National Forest land. Cravaack bill supporters say that **172,000 acres** of National Forest should be transferred to the State and used to maximize revenues from logging and mining. This amounts to **nearly 20%** of the existing National Forest outside the Boundary Waters.

### ***The bill proposes a land swap without showing locations targeted for exchange.***

The bill is deliberately unclear. It is likely that lands have been secretly identified by Cravaack and the mining companies.

<sup>1</sup> WaterLegacy greatly appreciates the excellent research on Federal Lands Exchange provided by Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness (<http://www.nmworg.org/>). However, WaterLegacy is solely responsible for the content of this Fact Sheet.

## **Why does it matter if National Forest lands are swapped?**

***Rep. Cravaack's bill removes protections for federal land exchange, such as:***

- Public participation required by National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA)
- NEPA requirements that an exchange won't violate other laws
- Federal Land Management and Planning Act requirements that appraisals ensure mining companies don't get windfalls at public expense
- Protection of Treaty rights of tribes to hunt, gather, and fish on federal land

**Example:** PolyMet wants 6,650 acres of Superior National Forest land to use for an open pit sulfide mine. Under current process, this exchange requires NEPA participation and analysis, tribal consultation, and appraisal under federal Uniform Rules to ensure that private lands that would be swapped are worth as much as the National Forest lands that would be lost. These protections will be lost if the PolyMet site is included in the Cravaack bill exchange.

***Rep. Cravaack's bill also would prevent the U.S. Forest Service from setting limits to protect forest users and wildlife from impacts of widespread prospecting.***

**Example:** The U.S. Forest Service recently required NEPA study and placed controls on minerals prospecting in the Kawishiwi area near the Boundary Waters. The mining companies protested any study or controls. If Forest lands were exchanged under the Cravaack bill, no such limits would be placed on future prospecting.

## **The Cravaack Bill is a Wolf in Sheep's Clothing**

**Myth:** Some politicians claim that the exchange plan is needed to increase school funding by letting the School Trust Lands get revenue from mining.

### **Facts:**

- Minnesota spends about \$9,000 per year for every student, but only \$25 (less than 1%) comes from School Trust Lands.
- The bill precludes what many consider the best option: that the State of Minnesota sell School Trust Lands in the Boundary Waters to the federal government and then invest the sale proceeds to benefit school children.
- No analysis has been done of the long-term financial risk to Minnesota schools and taxpayers associated with sulfide mining cleanup costs. Sulfide mines have created very expensive water pollution in every water rich environment where it has occurred. No analysis has been done of long-term financial risk to Minnesota schools and taxpayers if sulfide mining pollution contaminates Lake Superior and the Boundary Waters watersheds, as sulfide mining has done in every other water-rich environment.

## **You Can Help Protect the Superior National Forest**

Rep. Cravaack's bill can be stopped if no similar bill is proposed in Senate. Call Sen. Al Franken (218-722-2390) and Sen. Amy Klobuchar (218-741-9690). Tell them: "Please don't support any Senate version of Cravaack's signature land exchange bill, HR 5544."

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