



3

BOUNDARY WATERS (SOUTH KAWISHIWI RIVER)

THREAT: Sulfide-ore copper-nickel mining

STATES: Minnesota

SUMMARY

The South Kawishiwi River is essential to the lifeblood of the internationally renowned Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. However, the Boundary Waters and its pristine water, incredible hunting and fishing habitat, and economically important outdoor recreation are threatened by proposed sulfide-ore copper-nickel mining on public lands in the headwaters just outside of the wilderness area's boundary. The Trump administration and Congress must reject copper-nickel mining near the Boundary Waters and instead support measures that would protect these wildlands and waters forever.

SAVE THE
BOUNDARY WATERS

THE RIVER

The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness encompasses 1,200 miles of rivers and streams and more than 1,000 lakes. It is a vast boreal forest ecosystem of interconnected waterways with exceptionally clean water. The Minnesota state water quality agency has described the water quality as "immaculate," and in fact, many people recreating in the area drink water from the lakes untreated. The Kawishiwi (which in the Ojibwe language means "river of many beavers' houses") River is an important canoe route through the heart of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and the Superior National Forest. Its waters flow out of the wilderness through Birch Lake, re-enter the Boundary Waters through Fall and Basswood Lakes, and then flow into Ontario's Quetico Provincial Park and Minnesota's Voyageurs National Park.

The clean water of the Boundary Waters supports healthy and abundant fish and wildlife, including walleye, northern pike, lake trout, smallmouth bass, wolves, lynx, moose, bear, loons, river otters, bald eagles, and osprey.

As the most visited wilderness area in America, the Boundary Waters is a major driver of the local economy. Its rivers, streams, and lakes draw more than 155,000 overnight wilderness visitors annually and help power the recreation economy that supports more than 17,000 jobs in the region and generates more than \$1 billion in sales annually.

THE THREAT

The Boundary Waters and the Kawishiwi River are threatened by a massive sulfide-ore copper mine proposed on the banks of the South Kawishiwi River and Birch Lake. Over two dozen scientific studies over the past decade have indicated that pollution to these waters is probable if not inevitable if mining is allowed. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has flagged hard-rock mining as the most toxic

3

BOUNDARY WATERS (SOUTH KAWISHIWI RIVER)

Continued

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

DAVID MORYC

Senior Director, River Protection Program
American Rivers
503-307-1137
dmoryc@americanrivers.org

ELIZABETH RIGGS

Great Lakes Regional Director
American Rivers
734-794-3426
eriggs@americanrivers.org

SAMANTHA CHADWICK

Associate Director
Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness
218-248-2555
sam@savetheboundarywaters.org

TAKE ACTION:

[AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/
BOUNDARYWATERS2026](https://www.americanrivers.org/boundarywaters2026)



industry in America. Sulfide-ore copper mine contamination harms water, aquatic and terrestrial species, forests and soils, and poses a serious risk to human health.

Mining and associated acid mine drainage, loss of habitat, forest fragmentation, invasive species, and air, noise, and light pollution would devastate the fragile ecosystem of the Boundary Waters and its unique values.

Intensification and increased frequency of extreme rains and droughts would exacerbate the negative impacts of a mining operation. Drought-induced low water flows would concentrate pollutants. Subsequent heavy

rains could cause floods and the overflow of pollutants into groundwater and streams. Stress on aquatic ecosystems caused by extreme weather would add to the degradation caused by the impacts of mining. Conversely, an ecologically healthy Boundary Waters is part of the solution: Boreal forests provide for carbon sequestration and play a key role in the adaptation and resilience of species.

Studies show that sulfide-ore copper mining along lakes and streams that flow into the Boundary Waters would risk premier fishing, hunting, and other recreation on Superior National Forest lands, as well as northeastern Minnesota's economy. Economic analysis shows that sulfide-ore copper mining on Superior National Forest lands in the watershed of the Wilderness could lead to the loss of nearly 5,000 jobs in tourism and up to 22,000 jobs in the rest of the economy, along with a \$1.6 billion loss in annual income, and a \$509 million reduction in private-property values.

In January 2023, then-U.S. Interior Secretary Deb Haaland protected the Kawishiwi River and the Boundary Waters watershed from the devastation and pollution that inevitably accompany copper mining, but Congress and the current administration are seeking to revoke these protections, including through the controversial use of the Congressional Review Act, and greenlight mining in the area.

WHAT MUST BE DONE

Congress should protect the Boundary Waters forever. Representatives and senators must reject efforts to allow sulfide-ore copper mining near the Boundary Waters, such as rolling back existing protections using the Congressional Review Act.

Let your voice be heard. Stand up to protect this national treasure and ask your elected officials to permanently protect the Boundary Waters.