



Rep. Tom Emmer on Emmer Testifies Before House Natural Resources Committee

Broadcast: July 27, 2017 • Duration: 5:06

****CHAIRMAN GOSAR:**

** We now recognize Representative Emmer from Minnesota.

****REP. TOM EMMER:**

** Thank you Chairman Gosar, Ranking Member Lowenthal in his absentia, and the entire committee for hosting this hearing and allowing me to participate in a discussion that is so important to my state of Minnesota. I am here to discuss the reversal of a politically motivated and short-sighted action by the outgoing Obama administration to withdraw 400,000 acres in the Superior National Forest from mining and the refusal to renew mineral leases that have previously been reauthorized without question. When the Superior National Forest was established in 1909, and later when the Boundary Waters Canoe Area was established in 1978, there was an express agreement between the federal government and the state of Minnesota that certain activities, like mining and logging, could continue in the Superior National Forest. In fact, in the current Superior National Forest Land and Resource Management Plan, exploration and mining is considered a, quote, desired condition, and it just so happens that one of the largest precious metal deposits in the world has been discovered in Minnesota. Last December, after the election and before the new administration took office, the U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management refused to renew Minnesota's mineral leases and started the process of withdrawing about 400,000 acres from exploration. Considering the timing and the fact that a nearly identical programmatic withdrawal was proposed to the Obama administration just two years earlier but was denied, this unexpected action during the waning days of the last administration was clearly politically motivated and not based on sound policy. We have an opportunity to fix this. By considering this proposal, you are not authorizing any mining project in the Superior National Forest. We are simply recognizing the right of Minnesotans to exercise their mineral rights if any proposed mining can satisfy all of our stringent environmental requirements. We all believe in preserving and protecting our natural resources, and I have no doubt that we can find a way to preserve Minnesota's pristine landscape without permanently destroying any future job creation or economic development in our state. To be clear, there is no current project proposal to mine in the Superior National Forest within the Rainy River Watershed, none, nor does my draft legislation change the law to allow for mining or mineral exploration inside the Boundary Waters Canoe Area or its state and federal buffer zones. Therefore, the proposed withdrawal commenced by the Obama administration would impose a haphazard, overly expansive ban before any project could even be considered. Underground mining can take decades to plan and execute and must be done in accordance with the appropriate environmental and permitting regulations. Our steps today would simply allow for research and exploration to proceed. This process begins with exploration, surveys, and feasibility studies, which include environmental protection measures. Should extensive preliminary research indicate a mine would be economically viable, the company must still prepare and propose a detailed process for a project that adheres to existing state and federal laws. After this initial step is complete, the relevant federal agencies will publish a notice of intent to begin to prepare an environmental impact statement. This environmental review will require extensive periods of public comment, as well as responses to public



comment. Then, there are required waiting periods and more published information before a final decision is ever made. But wait, there's more. Even after all this, the project must apply for federal and state permits, which both have separate and additional environmental process reviews and, in many cases, more hearings. And this doesn't even detail the processes necessary at the state level. The point I'm trying to make is that our discussion draft before the committee today not only protects the potential jobs of thousands and the local economies of many small towns in Minnesota, but it also leaves intact an extensive process which will protect and preserve the environment and our beloved boundary waters. This is about Minnesota's right to these mineral leases promised by our federal government, which was a material part of the agreement made decades ago when the boundary waters were set aside and preserved. The Secretaries of Agriculture and the Interior may yet resolve this issue without the need for legislative action. In the meantime, however, we are doing our job to ensure that whether the matter is handled administratively or through legislation, Minnesota's mineral leases will be renewed, studies can be conducted, and Minnesotans can ensure the safe, responsible, and precise development of all that our state has to offer. With this discussion draft, we can protect future economic opportunity because we know that somehow, somewhere, someone will find a way to mine the precious metals in this area in a safe and environmentally sound way. And when that happens, Minnesota deserves to have that opportunity and the jobs and economic prosperity that will ensue. I thank the committee.

This transcript was independently produced by MN-06 Watch for accountability and archival purposes.

Source: (July 27, 2017)

Archived: February 06, 2026

Source URL: https://youtu.be/EuD6_eOdepQ

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