



The Honorable Secretary Tom Vilsack
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable Robert Bonnie
Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment
U.S. Department of Agriculture
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

The Honorable Thomas Tidwell
Chief, United States Forest Service
1400 Independence Ave., S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20250

June 30, 2016

Dear Secretary Vilsack, Under Secretary Bonnie and Chief Tidwell:

The United States Forest Service (USFS) recently announced that it may try to block the renewal of two federal mining leases for Twin Metals Minnesota in northeast Minnesota and prevent all future mining opportunities in the Rainy River Watershed moving forward. This is despite the USFS' previous support for these lease renewals in 1989 and 2004 when the agency stated that the leases had no adverse environmental impacts.

To make its decision, the USFS is conducting a 30-day public input period from June 20 to July 20, 2016, culminating with a public comment hearing on July 13 in Duluth, Minnesota. Rather than follow the formal and well-established environmental review process for mining projects set forth under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), the USFS has made the unprecedented and biased decision to potentially halt these projects before they can even begin. Environmental aspects of projects should be studied under the thorough, multi-agency, science-based Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process that is required by NEPA **after** a specific mining project is proposed, according to the formal process. It is not appropriate to address the USFS' speculative and hypothetical environmental concerns under the normally routine federal mineral lease renewal process.

Additionally, the public comment hearing on July 13 is scheduled for a time and location that is inconvenient for many of the primary stakeholders – people who live and work on the Iron Range. The current time and location will prevent those most affected by these proceedings from having their voices on this important matter be heard. The USFS is denying them equal and adequate input in this debate.

That said, we are writing to you in hopes that you'll encourage the USFS to hold a public comment and listening session in the Iron Range. For those who live and work on the Range, their economy, livelihoods and community depend on this.

Sincerely,



Steve Giorgi
Executive Director
Range Association of Municipalities & Schools



Nancy Norr
Jobs for Minnesotans Board Chair
Jobs for Minnesotans

More about RAMS

The Range Association of Municipalities & Schools (RAMS) was created in 1939 by the joining together of the Range Civic Association and the Range Municipalities Committee to promote legislation beneficial to its membership. Members include public entities within the Taconite Relief Area of NE Minnesota, school districts, and community businesses or vendors who work and serve in our cities and schools. The main function of RAMS is to monitor proposed State and Federal legislation and determine how it may affect Association member units. RAMS works closely with the Iron Range Delegation, the Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board (IRRRB), and area economic development entities to further community development and quality of life for all member units.

www.ramsmn.org

More about Jobs for Minnesotans

Jobs for Minnesotans is a coalition of organizations brought together and committed to advancing one common goal, job creation in Minnesota. Co-founded by the Minnesota Building and Construction Trades Council and the Minnesota Chamber of Commerce, Jobs for Minnesotans consists of organizations that represent more than 550,000 Minnesotans: businesses, middle class workers, labor and local governments among others.

www.jobsforminnesotans.org