



STATE *of* MINNESOTA

Executive Department

Governor Tim Walz

Executive Order 26-10

Enhancing Protection of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness

I, Tim Walz, Governor of the State of Minnesota, by the authority vested in me by the Constitution and applicable statutes, issue the following Executive Order.

The Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness ("BWCAW") is an extraordinary natural treasure for the State of Minnesota and the nation. Minnesotans and visitors from around the world come to the BWCAW's pristine waters and vast wilderness to canoe, camp, experience nature up close, and create lasting memories. The BWCAW is the most visited wilderness area in the United States and supports a robust local culture and economy of outfitters, youth camps, resorts, guides, and other small businesses.

The long-term health of the lakes and rivers in the Rainy River Headwaters Watershed ("RRHW") that flow into the BWCAW is critical to the viability of the BWCAW itself and the resources and lifeways integral to the Tribal Nations and Ojibwe communities who share geography with Minnesota. The RRHW is teeming with biodiversity, boasting some of the lowest levels of pollutants and highest quality fisheries in the state. Its unique biological, chemical, and physical features are worthy of additional protection. The RRHW is home to nonferrous mineral deposits owned by a mix of private entities, the State, and the federal government. Corporations continue to pursue the mining and development of these minerals, including a proposal by Twin Metals in December 2019. If one or more proposals within the RRHW proceeds to development and operation, the long-term health of the BWCAW could be threatened.

In 2023, the U.S. Department of the Interior withdrew 225,504 acres of Superior National Forest land from disposition under United States mineral and geothermal leasing laws for 20 years, limiting any development of nonferrous minerals on federal land for that period. However, the U.S. Congress recently approved cancellation of this 20-year federal protection, putting the RRHW and BWCAW at risk.

On April 10, 2026, after an administrative process which included expert testimony, a hearing, and a recommendation from an Administrative Law Judge, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources ("DNR") issued a final order that found "Minnesota Rule 6132.2000 is inadequate to protect the BWCAW from pollution, impairment, or destruction associated with noise and light impacts arising from nonferrous metallic mineral mining in the RRH [Rainy River Headwaters] watershed." To address that concern, the DNR concluded it would initiate a rulemaking proceeding to amend its rule or promulgate a new rule "to sufficiently protect the BWCAW from noise and light pollution."

Today, with renewed threats to Minnesota's cherished BWCAW, I will implement additional measures within my executive authority to help protect it for generations to come.

For these reasons, I order as follows:

1. The DNR will:

- a. Not undertake any environmental review or permitting work associated with proposals for nonferrous mineral mining in the RRHW until full and final resolution of the *Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness v. DNR* litigation challenging Minnesota Rule 6132.2000 under the Minnesota Environmental Rights Act and any subsequent rulemaking associated with that litigation.
- b. Not participate as a cooperating agency in any federal environmental review of any proposed nonferrous mining project in the RRHW.
- c. Not offer any new state nonferrous mineral leases in the RRHW.
- d. Not offer new state surface leases for nonferrous mining operations, including but not limited to disposal or storage of tailings or other waste materials, in the RRHW.
- e. Review existing state nonferrous mineral leases located within the RRHW and strictly enforce compliance with the terms of those leases to the fullest extent of the law.
- f. Draft legislative language prohibiting nonferrous mining in the RRHW for consideration as part of the agency's budget and policy development process.

2. The Minnesota Pollution Control Agency will:

- a. Not undertake any environmental review or permitting work associated with proposals for nonferrous minerals mining in the RRHW until full and final resolution of the *Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness v. DNR* litigation, challenging Minnesota Rule 6132.2000 under the Minnesota Environmental Rights Act and any subsequent rulemaking that the DNR will complete associated with that litigation.

This Executive Order is effective fifteen days after publication in the State Register and filing with the Secretary of State. It will remain in effect until rescinded by proper authority or until it expires in accordance with Minnesota Statutes 2025, section 4.035, subd. 3.

A determination that any provision of this Executive Order is invalid will not affect the enforceability of any other provision of this Executive Order. Rather, the invalid provision will be modified to the extent necessary so that it is enforceable.

Signed on August 18, 2026



Tim Walz, GOVERNOR

Filed August 18, 2026
Office of the Minnesota
Secretary of State
Steve Simon

Filed According to Law:



Steve Simon, SECRETARY OF STATE