Oppose Rep. Cravaack's H.R. 5544 which mandates and expedites the transfer of tens of thousands of acres of protected National Forest lands into State management intended to maximize revenue generation and is being legislated without public input or participation. Removing these lands from Federal administration would result in the loss of important protections, including the Weeks Act and other Acts, prohibition against strip mining and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review and appeal process. The underlying purpose of this bill would be to benefit mining companies by removing Federal protections and eluding steps in the standard land exchange process which includes public comment and participation, Native American Tribal consultation, environmental review and appeal.

Included in H.R. 5544 are parcels designated in Minnesota S.F. 1750 with priority to the Mesabi Purchase Unit. Changing these parcels from Federal to State ownership would be a strip mining give-away to multinational mining companies currently exploring for copper-nickel sulfide deposits: Teck Cominco, Twin Metals, Encampment Resources, and PolyMet. PolyMet’s proposed copper-nickel open pits, though not on school trust lands, would be located within what is now Superior National Forest. According to Forest Service comments in PolyMet’s Draft EIS, “It is the position of the United States that the mineral rights reserved ... do not include the right to open pit mine the National Forest lands.” According to the MDNR, mineral rights on school trust lands that are held by private mining interests will not generate money for the school trust fund. A Federal land exchange would be a windfall to PolyMet and other mining companies seeking to strip mine the low-grade disseminated ores of the Arrowhead, severed mineral rights have yet to be addressed. Back to www.sosbluewaters.org