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Comments: I am pleased to learn that the U.S. Forest Service and the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (DNR) have reached a good agreement for a federal purchase of about 80,000 acres of state-owned school trust lands and 3,200 acres of county tax-forfeited land inside the 1.1-million-acre Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) in the Superior National Forest in Minnesota. This proposal will benefit the BWCAW, but I am concerned that some local state legislators are trying to torpedo the proposal.

Because of wilderness designation, the school trust lands inside the BWCAW have not generated income for the Permanent School Fund from logging or mining, and Minnesota's fiduciary responsibility to the Permanent School Fund has not been met. The school trust lands inside the BWCAW and the tax-forfeited St. Louis County lands do not have wilderness protections currently, and these lands inside the BWCAW could be developed in the future!

Thankfully, the DNR and Forest Service now are proposing a federal purchase of these school trust lands within the BWCAW, using monies from the federal Land and Water Conservation Fund. A federal purchase will make administration of the BWCAW more efficient and provide far more money to the Permanent School Fund than would a land exchange, according to various analyses, including one by the local Timberjay newspaper. And this purchase proposal could finally resolve the lingering question of the BWCAW's school trust lands not providing any income for the Permanent School Fund.

But on August 15, a group of five local Republican state legislators wrote a letter to the DNR opposing the purchase, and instead pushing-again-for a land exchange. Among their claims is a wild one: that a purchase is illegal and would violate the 1964 Wilderness Act.

I am counting on the Forest Service to move ahead with the federal purchase of these school trust lands within the BWCAW, and to ignore the plea from the state legislators for a land exchange.