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Organization:

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Comments: My name is Doug Keseley and would like to comment about the purchase of approximately 100,000 acres in the BWCAW in which 80,000 acres are MN School Trust properties. I have been in a leadership role representing our cabin owners working with the US Forest Service for over 20 years on a land exchange to acquire our federal lease lots. My comments are mine personally and do not in any way represent the views of our organization. But, in my 20 years of working with the Forest Service, I am very familiar with the land exchange process and the situation with the school trust lands in the BWCAW. In fact, with the assistance of the USFS, our organization was extremely excited to be a part of the School Trust Land Exchange nearly 12 years ago during the initial proposal phase of the School Trust Land Exchange. We identified an island of school trust land in the BWCA on Trout Lake that would have been a perfect exchange for our existing cabin property. For over two years we were part of the that land exchange before the MN DNR sent us a letter to inform us, we would no longer be a part of that land exchange. Thus, another major disappointment and the Forest Service had been promising our organization would be next LE after the School Trust Land exchange is completed. That was 8 YEARS AGO!

With the failure of being able to complete this very large land exchange to every party's satisfaction, it is now at the point that the Federal government has budgeted the taxpayers' funds to purchase this BWCA school trust land. Many of the public and private organizations opposed losing a large portion of current national forest lands thus they pushed for the purchase. School trust lands are not usually receptive to sale proceeds for the land because of the one-time financial hit without the year over year financial school assistance. It was the intent of the State of Minnesota when our MN Founders developed the School Trust Land throughout the state to fund our children's education through ongoing incomes (i.e. logging, etc.). The current School Trust representatives are looking at this sale as "something is better than nothing!" and are reluctantly happy with the one-time purchase situation. This may be true, but the future of our education funding will be jeopardized. The other huge issue with this purchase is many of our elected officials of the MN legislature are saying it is illegal to sell school trust land per the 1964 BWCA Wilderness Act which clearly states that these school trust lands need to be transferred via land exchanges. That would create that year-over-year revenue stream. They are exactly correct! The USFS is saying that the Weeks Act of 1916 allows the federal government to purchase public land. They are also correct. To me, which I am far from a legal scholar, the latest law should take precedent. Thus, I see years and years of legal battles that just cost us more taxpayer dollars!

Ask yourself "How does the federal government complete a land exchange without giving up a huge chunk of public US forest land?" Also. "How do the school trust representatives transfer the un-used value of these BWCA properties into renewable annual financial returns?"

Here is the solution:

The Federal Government (USFS) can buy public lands via the Weeks Act - Right. With a little homework, the USFS could buy public farmland in southern or western MN, preferably owned by the Chinese or other foreign investment firms, that could equal the same value as all the school trust land in the BWCAW. Once that purchase is complete, all those parcels of equal value can be land exchanged for the BWCAW school trust land. Thus, instead of the Chinese or foreign companies owning MN farmland, it would be owned by the School Trust as renewable annual rental income from the current existing farmers. Instead of monies going to international interest, it would go to the education of our MN children as a huge financial boost on an annual basis forever!

That sure make sense to me and is a Win - Win for all of the parties involved and all of us as taxpayers.

Thank you for listening,

Doug Keseley