



Office of Governor Tim Walz & Lt. Governor Peggy Flanagan

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BWCA Executive Order: Governor Walz Remarks as Prepared

[ST. PAUL, MN] – Below is a copy of Governor Tim Walz’s remarks following [Executive Order 26-10](#).

Thank you for being here today.

About a decade ago, a writer for the *New York Times* came to Minnesota to visit the Boundary Waters. Here’s how he described a moment in time at Rebecca Falls:

Chickadees, white-throated sparrows, finches, grosbeaks and loons called out. A bald eagle glided overhead and an osprey crashed into the water a hundred yards away. The lake was layered with sweet flag, sedge, lilies, horehound, bulrush and buckbean. The air smelled like stagnant water, rotting wood, pine and sweet columbine. Wild licorice, fireweed, hawkweed, bastard toadflax and littleleaf pussytoes created a carpet underfoot. Thin, green marsh fern circled lakes alongside moonwort, rattlesnake fern and horsetail.

Marveling at the sensory overload, the writer chalked it up to, quote, “ten millenniums of photosynthesis and a century of legislation.”

That’s the alchemy of the Boundary Waters. This perfect place exists because of God’s plan and the decisions we mortals make to protect it. Each generation has done its part, knowing that, although these waters feel eternal, they are not invulnerable. Once the majesty of the Boundary Waters is gone, no corporation, no government, no act of God will bring it back.

And yet, for decades now, international mining corporations have eyed the Rainy River Headwaters Watershed as a potential site for a copper-nickel mine. And for years, we’ve been in a battle over the future of the Boundary Waters. Minnesotans have watched nervously as lawmakers and regulators have wrestled over whether or not to allow this beautiful place to be spoiled.

Well, I’m proud to say that uncertainty ends today.

This morning, I’m using my executive authority to put an end to the Trump administration’s relentless attacks on the sanctity of the Boundary Waters. Under the executive order I’m issuing, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and Minnesota Pollution Control Agency will refuse to participate in any process that leads to nonferrous mining in the Rainy River Headwaters Watershed.

And while the details of the order may be comprehensive, the upshot is really simple: As far as my administration is concerned, the fight for the future of the Boundary Waters is over. The verdict is in. The decision is made. We *will* protect this place.

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I first came to the Boundary Waters some thirty years ago. Gwen and I had just moved to Mankato, and I was champing at the bit to get up there to see what all the fuss was about. So I saved up my coaching checks and drove up to Ely to see Steve and Nancy Piragis. I couldn't afford new, but they gave me a great deal on a used Wenonah Prism, made right here in Minnesota, and I practiced out on Duck Lake before I made the trip up north.

The geographer in me was excited about the challenge of navigating those waters—I mean, how often do you get to use paper maps and a compass in today's world? The outdoorsman in me was thrilled about simply being in such a pristine, untouched wilderness. And the teacher in me knew I had to bring some kids up there to experience it for themselves.

The Boundary Waters quickly became a favorite destination for our family. And, about a decade ago, it took on added significance when we lost my brother, Craig, on the shores of Duncan Lake. A sudden storm blew up, tearing trees from the light soil. In the midst of the blowdown, Craig got everyone out of their sleeping bags and off to safety, throwing his body over his 14-year-old son, Jake, in an effort to protect him from falling trees. Jake made it out alive, albeit with more than a dozen broken bones.

Later, we heard about strangers who had risked their own lives canoeing in from a mile away to help rescue Jake and the rest of their party. They paddled into danger because they respected the code of the Boundary Waters, and because that's what neighbors do for each other in this state.

The Boundary Waters, then, aren't just a beautiful place. They're a sacred place, for my family, for our Tribal nations, and for so many others. Generations have made pilgrimages to northern Minnesota not just to enjoy the Boundary Waters but to pay their respects, leaving nothing but footprints and taking nothing but treasured photographs.

Today's action is just the latest my administration has taken to protect Minnesota's natural resources.

From day one, we've recognized that protecting our environment, cutting emissions, and creating the green economy of the future can't happen in siloes, which is why we took a whole-of-government approach and established a climate Subcabinet, laying the foundation for all the success that would follow.

By the numbers: We've cut greenhouse gas emissions by more than 16 percent since 2018. For the first time, more than half our power comes from zero-carbon sources—the most of any Midwestern state. And we're on track to reach 100 percent carbon-free electricity by 2040.

Meanwhile, we've acquired more than 36,000 acres of land for permanent protection—and returned thousands of acres to our Tribal neighbors. We've enrolled well over a million acres in our voluntary agriculture program, helping our state's producers protect our water resources from runoff. We passed the first comprehensive native fish conservation bill, and we've overseen the first Lake Sturgeon spawning in the Red River Basin in more than 100 years. And we've helped to transform 11 million acres of residential lawns into pollinator-friendly native plantings.

From banning so-called "forever chemicals" to planting 18 million tree seedlings, we've sought to make Minnesota a healthier, greener state—and it's working.

We've increased visitors to our state parks by nearly 20 percent. And we're regularly ranked as the top state for outdoors enthusiasts, hiking, fishing, summer road trips, city and state park systems—there's no better place to be outside, and Americans know it. That's not just an advertisement for Minnesota—it's an industry. Outdoor recreation contributes nearly \$14 billion to our economy and supports nearly 100,000 jobs statewide.

But maybe the piece of our legacy I'm proudest of is that we've proven, once and for all, that we don't have to choose between a green Minnesota and a prosperous Minnesota. Indeed, sustainability is good business—and the numbers bear it out.

We've created more than 60,000 clean energy jobs and cut red tape to reduce permitting timelines for clean energy projects going forward. We've increased recycling and composting by 15 percent, supporting another 78,000 jobs and \$24 billion in economic activity. We've created a nation-leading sustainable aviation fuel tax credit—and when Trump slashed the federal version, we boosted ours to keep this growing industry thriving here in Minnesota.

Meanwhile, we've saved homeowners and businesses \$728 million through weatherization and conservation upgrades—preventing 3.5 million tons of CO2 emissions. We've helped state agencies save more than \$100 million in energy costs. And we've made Minnesota a leader in electric vehicle adoption in the Midwest, more than tripling the percentage of car sales that are electric vehicles and increasing charging ports by more than 1,400 percent.

We have done these things not just because we care about both our economy and our environment, but because we understand that the two are inextricably tied together.

As Minnesotans, we are raised to treat our surroundings with reverence.

We leave the campsite better than we found it.

We teach our kids to respect the water, and the woods, and the wildlife that depends on them.

We understand that just because something is ours to enjoy does not mean it is ours to destroy.

The Boundary Waters represent a treasure we share—not just with each other, but with future generations of Minnesotans who will come here to be at peace with nature.

And when those future Minnesotans stand at Rebecca Falls, listening to the loons, smelling the columbine, feeling the fireweed beneath their feet, they'll know that peace—and they'll know that we acted to protect it.

Ten millennia of photosynthesis. A century of legislation. And, today, one more generation doing its part.

Thank you.