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## Cravaack introduces Boundary Waters land swap bill

The state would get acres outside of the wilderness for mining and logging.

By: [John Myers](#), Duluth News Tribune

Just days after the Minnesota Legislature approved a plan to trade state land in the Boundary Waters for federal land outside the federal wilderness, U.S. Rep. Chip Cravaack has introduced the deal in Congress.

Cravaack, R-North Branch, introduced the bill Tuesday that would order the U.S. Forest Service to trade for about 86,000 acres of state land locked inside the 1.1 million-acre federal Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.

In exchange, the state would get a similar amount of Superior National Forest land outside the wilderness — acres that could then be mined, logged and otherwise managed for state revenue, primarily to stock the state's public school trust fund.

The bill would direct the U.S. Secretary of Agriculture, who oversees the Forest Service, to conclude the exchange within one year.

"I am happy to support the efforts of the Minnesota Legislature and the Governor by introducing a bill that will direct the secretary to implement the state-passed land swap plan," Cravaack said in a prepared statement. "As we move forward, I will continue working with Minnesotans at the local level, as well as the DNR, the Forest Service, involved stakeholders, and my colleagues across the aisle in putting Minnesota students first."

The bill goes to the House Natural Resources Committee for consideration. No Senate bill has yet been introduced.

Gov. Mark Dayton signed the state legislation allowing the land deal on April 27, and the effort seems to be moving fast after years of languishing.

Supporters say the proposal will end a decades-long dispute over what to do with the state land tied up inside the BWCAW since the current wilderness boundaries were adopted in 1978. The state has been unable to earn revenue for the school trust fund because federal regulations don't allow logging or mining in the wilderness. They say newly acquired federal lands outside the BWCAW now can be transferred to the state, which will allow mining and logging.

Opponents say that's exactly the problem, that the exchange drastically would reduce the overall size of the Superior National Forest outside the wilderness — opening potentially sensitive lands to less-strict state regulations for mining and logging. Critics say the deal is being rushed to promote mining in areas near Ely that would transfer from federal to state control.

While critics of federal government land management want an all-trade land deal with the state, BWCAW supporters and mining critics instead favor a total federal purchase of the state lands to keep the Superior National Forest its current size. Environmental groups contend the school trust fund would be better off with cash than land because of the boom-and-bust cycles of the logging and mining industries. The Sierra Club and other groups are asking U.S. senators to pursue legislation to buy the state land rather than trade for it.

The state bill ignored months of work by a legislative advisory working group made up of state and federal land experts, nonprofits, county officials, timber industry leaders and more that backed a hybrid compromise that would sell roughly half of the state land to the feds and exchange the other half. Under that compromise deal struck last winter, the state would have traded about 43,000 acres and sold another 43,000 acres to the feds. But lawmakers scrapped that compromise and substituted their own language.

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