

International Union of Operating Engineers

LOCAL NO. 49, 49A, 49B, 49C, 49D, AND 49E
MINNESOTA • NORTH DAKOTA • SOUTH DAKOTA

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11/21/17

Dear Congressional Leaders,

On behalf of The International Union of Operating Engineers Local 49, I am writing to urge your support for H.R. 3905, the “Minnesota’s Economic Rights (MINER) in the Superior National Forest Act,” bipartisan legislation sponsored by Cong. Tom Emmer (MN-6th) and cosponsored by Cong. Collin Peterson (MN-7th), Cong. Jason Lewis (MN-2nd). H.R. 3905 is currently on the agenda of the House Rules Committee, on a path for House floor action in the coming weeks.

In 1950, Congress took action to make land available for mineral exploration and development within the Superior National Forest (SNF) within the Iron Range region in Northeast Minnesota. In 1978, Congress prohibited mining within the region’s Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) and an adjacent protective buffer zone, while reaffirming that mining should be allowed and promoted in the remaining area of the SNF.

Unfortunately, the economic future of the region is now threatened by federal agency actions initiated in December 2016 that would cancel valid, long-standing federal mineral leases and withdraw 235,000 acres of federal land in the region from future mining development, contrary to previous directives by Congress. If allowed to stand, these agency actions will eliminate the possible creation of thousands of good-paying construction jobs, billions of dollars in economic growth, and billions more in revenues for Minnesota’s public schools through mineral development on state school trust lands.

H.R. 3905 aims to correct the injustices being thrust upon the Iron Range by requiring congressional approval of any mineral withdrawal or monument designation involving the National Forest System lands in the State of Minnesota, as well as providing for the renewal of certain mineral leases and ensuring future leases in the area remain valid and renewed as outlined by current law. Moreover, H.R. 3905 changes no environmental review processes, relaxes no environmental standards, and specifically restates Congress’ prohibition on any mining activity in the BWCAW and surrounding protective buffer.

There have been several local hearings related to the issue of mineral withdrawal in the last year. I have attended all of them. At every one, the local voices of Iron Rangers in support of mining, the people that live where the mining activity would take place, STRONGLY outnumbered the voices (mostly from the Twin Cities) that were there to ban mining. It is a very simple fact that the people that live where the mining is proposed strongly support mining.

We have tough environmental laws in Minnesota that protect our lands and our water. We very much support those laws and are glad that a thorough process is in place to permit projects. Nothing in this legislation changes our permitting process. In fact in our opinion, this legislation returns us to a process that works. Instead of banning all mining before any project has been proposed, we can follow existing law and scrutinize projects as they come forward based on science not emotion.

At the end of the day, we should listen to the people that are the most directly impacted by mining, reverse the decision of Washington bureaucrats and special interests, and return to a tried and true process for approving mining projects that has stood the test of time.

We strongly urge your vote in support of H.R 3905.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. George', written in a cursive style.

Jason George
Political and Special Projects Director
International Union of Operating Engineers Local 49