



# A WATERSHED MOMENT

Findings from  
*Potential Metals Mining and  
Voyageurs National Park*

## QUICK FACT

Voyageurs National Park encompasses 84,000 acres of water, or an area roughly the size of Minneapolis and Duluth combined.

**VOYAGEURS NATIONAL PARK** encompasses more than 84,000 acres of water—an area roughly the size of Minneapolis and Duluth combined. The park waters are home to loons, snapping turtles and wood frogs, and 53 species of fish, including lake sturgeon, walleye, and northern pike. These native species rely on clean water to thrive.

The nearly 250,000 people who visit Voyageurs each year enjoy kayaking, canoeing, boating, and world-class fishing in the pristine waters of Rainy Lake, Lake Kabetogama, and Namakan Lake.

But the lakes and rivers of Voyageurs National Park are now at risk from nearby sulfide mining.

**“Voyageurs is at the downstream end of its watershed, so everything entering the watershed passes through it before reaching Canada. Mercury contamination, leaching of arsenic, or other acid mine drainage will pass through the park.”**

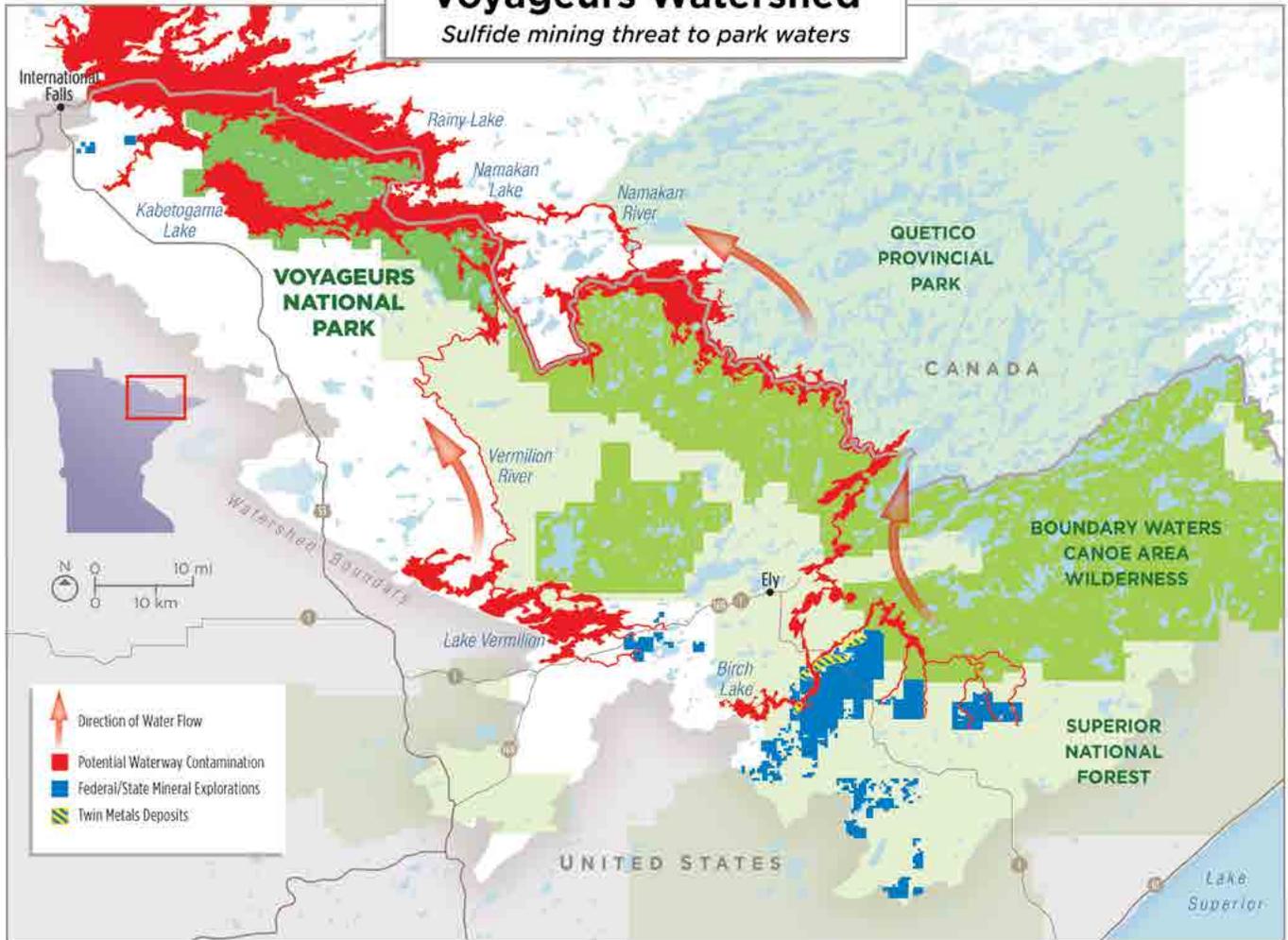
— Tom Myers, PhD, Hydrologist



Above: Rainy Lake ©Jeffrey Kantor Left: Mergansers in Sand Point Lake ©Scott Hagel

# Voyageurs Watershed

*Sulfide mining threat to park waters*



## KEY FINDINGS

- Because of the watershed's unique geology and water-dominated landscape, acid mine **pollution from sulfide mines as far as 100 miles away** will impact Voyageurs National Park.
- Even small amounts of contamination will impact the park's fish, wildlife and entire ecosystem for decades.
- The long-term nature of sulfide mining pollution means it is nearly impossible to stop once it starts; there would be little chance of preventing the pollution from reaching Voyageurs National Park.
- Mercury has already impaired Voyageurs National Park's lakes, necessitating fish consumption advisories. Even small quantities of acid mine pollution **will increase the mercury in the park's waters**, further endangering both fish and humans.
- Mine waste, or tailings, would be stored behind dams that must not fail in perpetuity or they will release acid mine drainage. However, research shows that **failures are common, and leakage in the watershed** could flow toward the park, putting its waters at risk.

## THE THREAT

Recent proposals to mine copper, gold and nickel in the sulfide ore deposits of Northern Minnesota represent a significant threat to this national park. When sulfide ore is exposed to water and air, it produces sulfuric acid. This acid, which drains from the mine's waste rock, can create long-lasting water pollution harming people, plants, fish and wildlife.

Pollution from the mines can also send toxic heavy metals downstream, such as mercury and sulfates. This phenomenon has been well-documented at mining operations throughout the U.S. and worldwide.

Corporations are exploring a number of sulfide-ore deposits in the watersheds draining into Voyageurs National Park, leaving the park particularly threatened.

## Local Tourism at Risk

Sport fishing in Minnesota lakes and rivers contributes \$2.4 billion to the state's economy, and clean water is critical to a healthy tourism economy. Outdoor recreation, including boating, camping, kayaking and canoeing are essential to the Minnesota way of life.

Visitors to Voyageurs National Park each year contribute more than \$16 million to the local economy and support 225 jobs. Polluted lakes or rivers and fish that are contaminated will put that local economy at risk.

**“Over three-quarters of a million people draw their source drinking water from the [watershed]...good water quality in these waters is important...”**

— International Joint Commission, January 22, 2015

**“No hard rock surface mines exist today that can demonstrate that [acid mine drainage] can be stopped once it occurs on a large scale.”**

— Report for U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2008



## NEXT STEPS

The International Joint Commission (IJC), a bi-national body, issued the proposed Water Quality Plan of Study for the Rainy River/Lake of the Woods Watershed in early 2015. It recommends action to scientifically assess the risk from new mining proposals in the watershed.

Sound science is the best path forward, but funding from the U.S. and Canada must be secured for the research.

Additionally, any new mining in this region may increase the contamination already in the system from existing and past mining in the watershed. Given the threat to the economy, recreation, and

wildlife, government officials and resource managers charged with evaluating new mining proposals must consider the risks to Voyageurs National Park as well as the cumulative effects of all mining proposals in the U.S. and Canada.

### Support is Growing

This multi-national region is home to some of our greatest natural treasures, including Voyageurs National Park and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness in the U.S. and Quetico Provincial Park in Canada. Communities across the region are calling on better environmental reviews and standards for sulfide mining proposals to

ensure we don't let mining destroy these protected areas.

Access to the best available data about mining in the region is the key to help decision-makers understand and take steps to control the impact that sulfide mining will have on the economy, recreation and way of life in this region.

Join the growing support for Voyageurs National Park and the protection of its waters. Visit [npca.org/supportvoya](http://npca.org/supportvoya) for more information.

**Above:** Sunrise on Rainy Lake ©Joshua Henderson  
**Below:** ©Greg Yoder

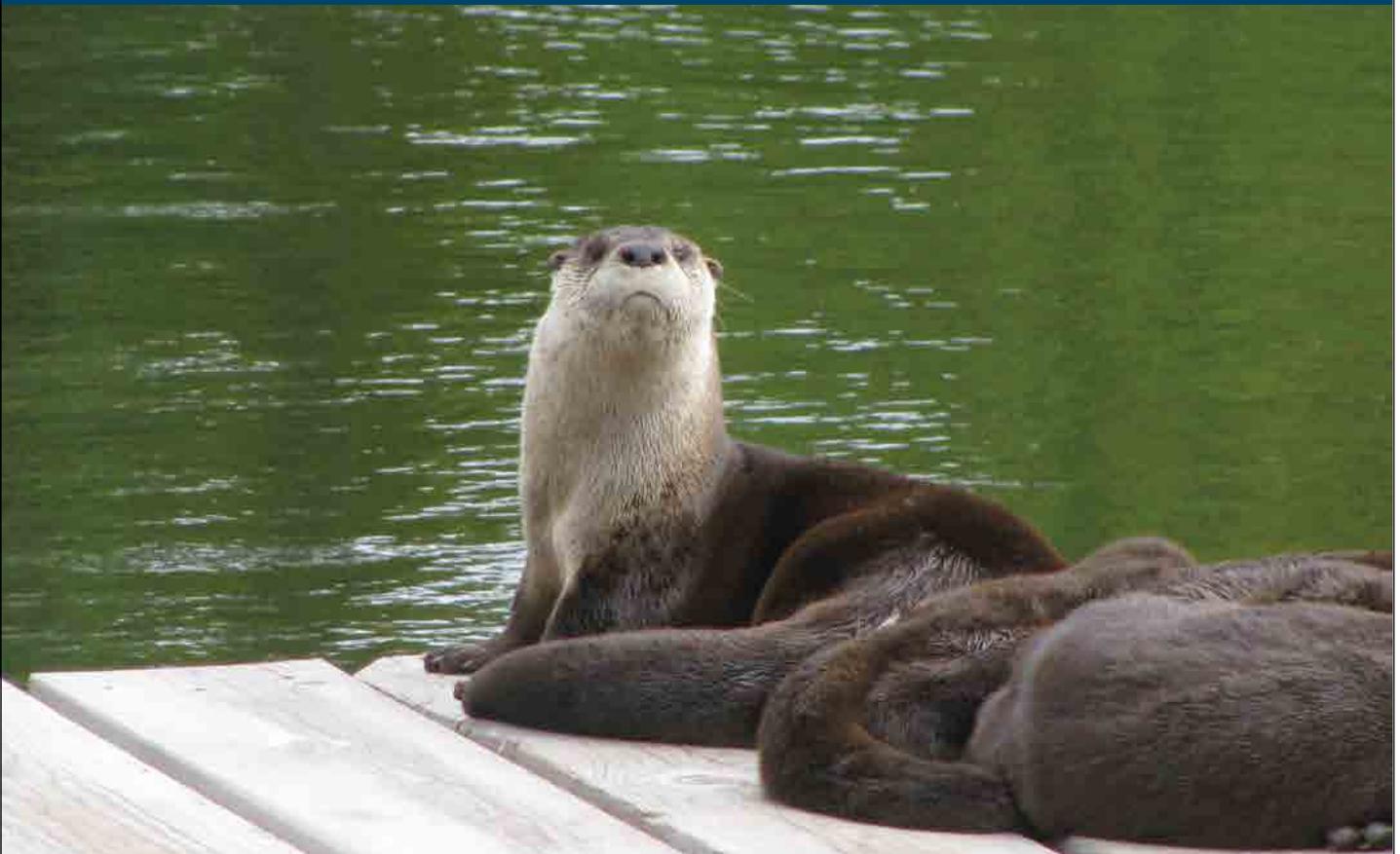
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Below: Lake Kabetogama ©NPS



For more information, visit [npca.org/supportvoya](http://npca.org/supportvoya) or [voyageurs.org/cleanwater](http://voyageurs.org/cleanwater)

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