



117 South First Street • Montevideo, MN 56265

March 11, 2025

Chair Heintzeman
House Environment and Natural Resource Finance and Policy Committee
Re: H.F.1425

Chair Heintzeman and Committee Members,

CURE is a rurally based, non-profit organization dedicated to protecting and restoring resilient towns and landscapes by harnessing the power of the people who care about them. We appreciate the opportunity to testify in opposition to H.F. 1425 and S.F. 1702.

The current situation of checkerboarded ownership of public lands in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness is not optimal for Minnesota's School Trust and its finances, nor does it allow for the unified management of the wilderness under the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) that would ideally benefit land management and matters such as fire suppression and treaty-protected uses of the lands. As a result, for many years there have been discussions of ways to transfer ownership of state-owned lands managed by the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) that are functionally locked up in federal lands, so that the School Trust can fulfill its purpose of producing sustainable funding for our state public schools.

The land sale that has been proposed and is in accordance with Minnesota Statute 92.82, is the best deal for Minnesota's schools and its public lands. This sale is going to produce the most funding for the schools and does not risk putting undue additional stress on the environment that could occur if a now-abandoned land swap was restarted and finalized.

This bill is not simply a "solution in search of a problem." It in fact creates a novel problem after the DNR, USFS, and School Trust have spent decades seeking a solution to the land impasse. The amount of time and money that has been expended setting up this land sale, and the good projections for the trust's earnings all argue strongly in favor of keeping the law as it is and not adopting this prohibition on the land sale. By following through with the sale, Minnesota will be richer, our public lands will be subject to clearer management authority, and the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness can continue to be a major economic driver and draw for northern Minnesota of which we can all be proud.

Prohibiting the land sale would rob the School Trust of significant sustainable funding, without any demonstrable benefit to regional economics or employment. This would be concerning in any context but is even more troubling given that our schools are experiencing a severe budget shortfall, cutting staffing and services. According to a February 25, 2025 article in the Ely Echo, "School budget deeper in red," the Ely School District is facing an additional \$318,495 deficit to the '24-'25 budget. This is after the District took measures to cut back staff hours and responsibilities while raising fees that fall on families. This bill does not seem to share any concern for these teaching and childcare jobs, or the burden imposed on working parents.

While the timber industry is a part of our Northern Minnesota identity and remains important for land management and sustainable resource development, it is not going to make up the money lost in this land sale if this process re-starts and ends with a land swap as is apparently intended by this bill. Wasting years of effort and planning that went into this land sale in order to get less money for Minnesota's schools and children is a lose-lose, and this bill should not advance.

Sincerely,

/s/ Hudson Kingston
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