

2015 – 06 School Trust Lands Exchange

BACKGROUND:

When MN became a state in 1858, it received Congressional land grants from Congress. These grants were intended to generate financial support for public education. They were known as School Trust grants in general. Over time the boundary waters area became famous for its wild lands, scenic beauty to the extent that it inspired conservation and environmental leaders to secure a series of protective legislation that emphasized preservation, not, revenue generation. Over 80,000 acres of MN School Trust lands remain in the present BWCAW.

This has created controversy. Efforts to resolve the problem have gone on unsuccessfully for over forty years. There have been proposals to exchange land between MN and the federal government, buy the lands from MN outright through federal appropriation, and the League among other groups gave support at one time to generating revenue through a BWCAW user fee, while the lands themselves remained owned by MN.

In 2010, the no longer existing Legislative Permanent School Trust Fund Advisory Committee appointed a working group to develop a strategy to resolve the long standing dispute. The working group recommended a partial sale and land exchange as their proposed solution. In 2012 the Governor of MN signed legislation authorizing sale and expedition of efforts to do a land exchange.

1/3 of the MN BWCAW School Trust Lands (30,000) would be exchanged for 39,000 acres of Superior National Forest Lands outside the BWCAW. The U.S.F.S proposes to seek funding to purchase the remaining 2/3 (50,000 approx.) from a combination of unknown private sources, and, the Land & Water Conservation Fund.

The proposal for the lands to be exchanged in present federal public ownership inside the Superior National Forest are driven by U.S.F.S. mandate to consolidate lands, and, resolve the issue of the state of MN being unable to fulfill its mandate to give precedence to economic return from the School Trust lands it owns with-in the BWCAW.

COMMENTS & CONCERNS:

Minnesota Division Izaak Walton League of America agrees that a resolution to this long-standing dispute is a reasonable and positive goal. We are committed to using an option that minimizes harm to our natural resources and outdoor recreation on our public lands.

The best options lie in either a full buy-out, or a user fee. There may be a day when a MN presence through ownership of land inside the BWCAW is required in order to protect wilderness values.

Our main concern is that under current state policy (2012 MN legislation) these lands will now be School Trust Lands and that major use will actually swing to over-emphasizing revenue general through mineral exploitation and intensive forest harvest with little room for balanced resource management.

The current proposal intends that the remaining BWCAW MN School Trust Lands be purchased with Land & Water Conservation Fund. LAWCON expires in 2015, it is in danger of not being re-authorized, and, even if it is, LAWCON has persistently been severely underfunded by

Congress thru-out its entire 50-year history. The U.S. should seriously attempt to resolve that problem by pursuing a surcharge to the present BWCAW entry fee. Such a fee would meet the spirit and intent of the MN Constitutional dedication of revenue generation from School Trust Lands, and, avoid compromising public ownership in the Superior National Forest.

RESOLVE:

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED: That the Minnesota Division of the Izaak Walton League of America on the 26th Day of April, 2015 strongly supports cash compensation to the Permanent School Trust Fund for the full buy-out of all School Trust Lands with-in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness.

The MN Division of the Izaak Walton League of America, in the interest of finally and fully resolving a long-standing conflict, can reluctantly support a properly vetted exchange of up to 1/3 of the School Trust Lands within the Wilderness for federal lands outside the Wilderness boundary only so long as the remaining 2/3rds of the School Trust Lands within the Wilderness are purchased at the same time.

The MN Division of the Izaak Walton League of America OPPOSES the current proposed land exchange of approximately 39,000 acres of Superior National Forest outside the Wilderness as a result of the concerns noted in the body of this resolution noted above.