A WATERSHED MOMENT

Findings from
Potential Metals Mining and Voyageurs National Park

QUICK FACT

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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.

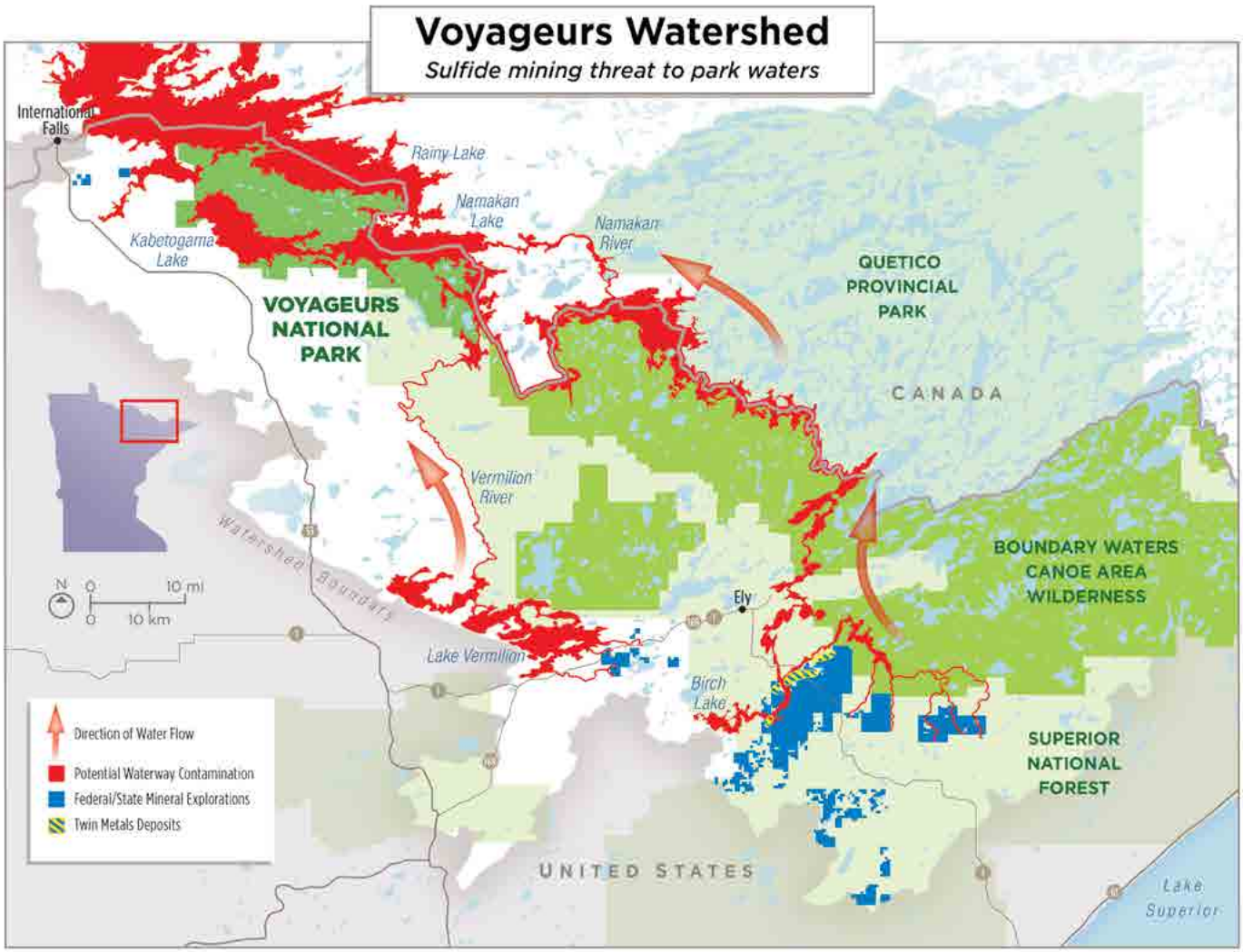
The nearly 250,000 people who visit Voyageurs each year enjoy kayaking, canoeing, boating, and world-class fishing in the pristine waters of Rainy Lake, Lake Kabetogama, and Namakan Lake.

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



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.