

#### 1 **4.2.12 Wilderness and Other Special Designation Areas**

2 For this analysis, the term “wilderness” is defined by the Wilderness Act of 1964 (Public Law  
3 88-577) (16 USC 1131-1136) of 1964. In its planning, management and monitoring, the Forest  
4 Service identifies four characteristics of wilderness, as defined in the Wilderness Act:

- 5 • Untrammeled: The Wilderness Act states that wilderness "[is] an area where the earth and its  
6 community of life are untrammeled by man," and "generally appears to have been affected  
7 primarily by the forces of nature." This quality monitors human activities that directly control  
8 or manipulate the components or processes of ecological systems inside wilderness.
- 9 • Undeveloped: The Wilderness Act states that wilderness is "an area of undeveloped Federal  
10 land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or  
11 human habitation," "where man himself is a visitor who does not remain" and "with the  
12 imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable." This quality monitors the presence of  
13 structures, construction, habitations, and other evidence of modern human presence or  
14 occupation.
- 15 • Natural: The Wilderness Act states that wilderness is "protected and managed so as to  
16 preserve its natural conditions." This quality monitors both intended and unintended effects  
17 on ecological systems inside a wilderness. The natural quality of wilderness character may  
18 potentially be impacted by actions located outside the wilderness through impacts to water  
19 quality and air quality.
- 20 • Solitude or a Primitive and Unconfined Type of Recreation: - The Wilderness Act states that  
21 wilderness has "outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of  
22 recreation." This quality monitors conditions that affect the opportunity for people to  
23 experience solitude or primitive, unconfined recreation in a wilderness setting. An indicator  
24 of this quality is remoteness from occupied and modified areas outside the wilderness, such  
25 as noise or visual impacts.

26 Other federal special-designation areas are identified by Presidential Designation, Congressional  
27 Designation, or Administrative Designation and define lands that are considered to have  
28 remarkable ecological, paleontological, historic, scenic, recreational, geologic, or fish and  
29 wildlife value. They include wilderness areas, wilderness study areas, research natural areas and  
30 candidate research natural areas (RNAs/cRNAs), national scenic or historic trails, wild or scenic  
31 rivers, unique biological areas, national natural landmarks, national historic landmarks, and  
32 national monuments, among others. These special-designation areas are managed by federal land  
33 management agencies such as the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), USFS, Park Service, and  
34 USFWS. The state similarly designates areas for special management due to their wilderness  
35 value.

36 None of the elements of the NorthMet Project Proposed Action are located within or adjacent to  
37 any wilderness areas. Similarly there are no special designation areas within or adjacent to the  
38 Mine Site, Plant Site, or Transportation and Utility Corridor. While recreation facilities such as  
39 parks are listed in this section, recreational use of those facilities is described in Section 4.2.11.

#### 40 **4.2.12.1 Federally Managed Areas**

41 | This section discusses federally managed wilderness and special designation areas that are close  
42 | enough to the NorthMet Project area that they may be affected by project activities.

#### 43 | **4.2.12.1.1 Wilderness Areas**

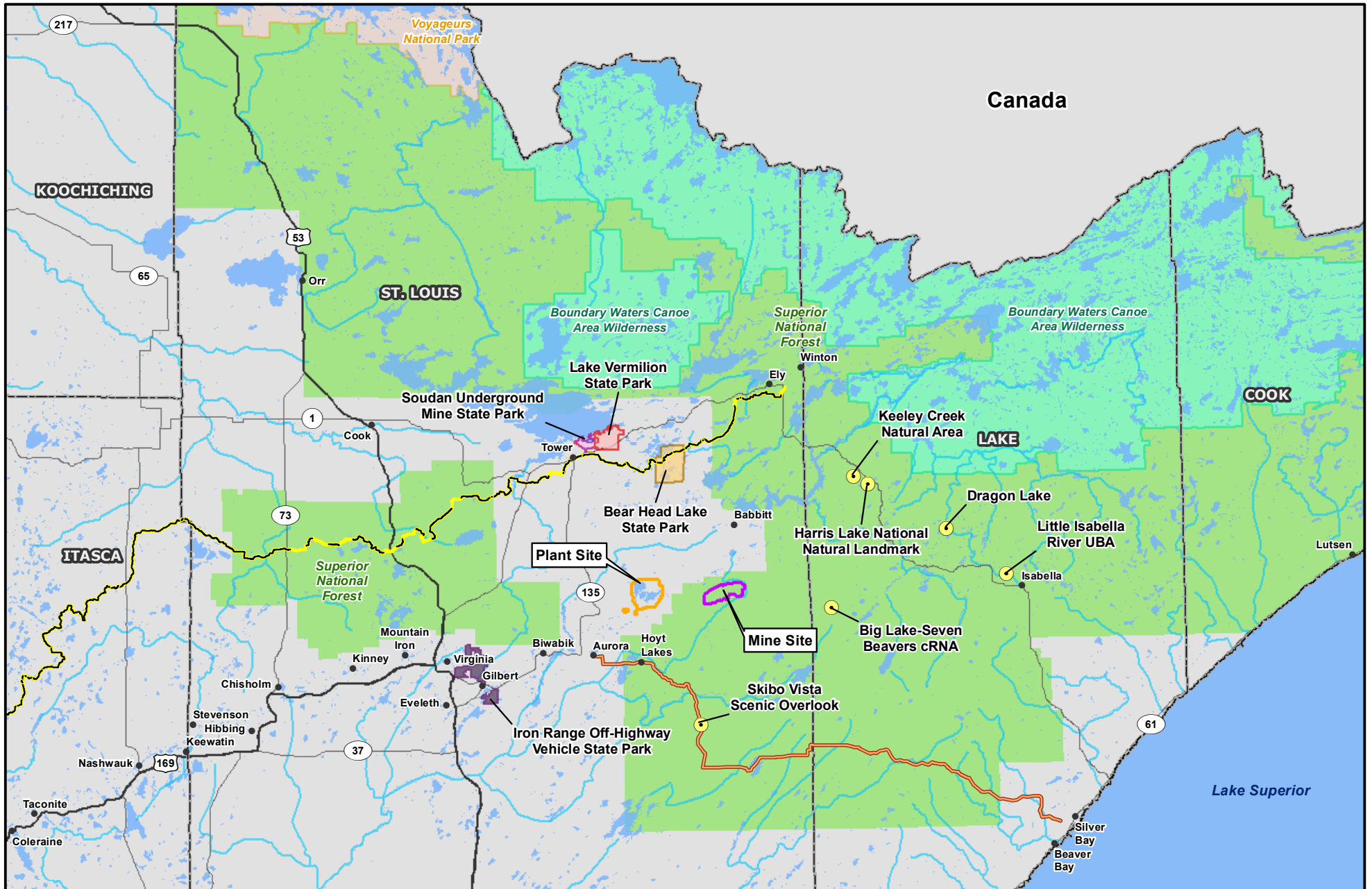
44 | The NorthMet Project area is approximately 20 miles south of the BWCAW (see Figure  
45 | 4.2.12-1). The BWCAW was formally designated a wilderness area in 1978 under Public Law  
46 | 95-495, and encompasses more than 1 million acres along the United States' international  
47 | boundary with Canada. The BWCAW is managed by the USFS as part of the larger Superior  
48 | National Forest. It attracts more than 250,000 visitors annually and is used year-round for  
49 | camping, hiking, fishing, canoeing, and hunting. Motorized vehicle use is limited. Activity and  
50 | access are controlled by use permits managed by the USFS (USFS 2004c).

51 | The BWCAW contains several hundred miles of streams and approximately 1,175 lakes that  
52 | vary in size from 10 to 10,000 acres. Together, there are about 190,000 acres of open water or 20  
53 | percent of the surface area of the BWCAW that provides opportunities for long-distance travel  
54 | by watercraft. The BWCAW is the only large lakeland wilderness in the National Wilderness  
55 | Preservation System (University of Montana 2011).

56 | The wilderness has approximately 80 entry points that provide access to 1,200 miles of  
57 | designated canoe routes, 18 hiking trails, and nearly 2,200 campsites. There are numerous  
58 | cultural resources in the BWCAW including camp sites, villages, wild ricing sites, cemetery  
59 | areas, pictographs, and sites of spiritual and traditional importance. The wilderness also contains  
60 | evidence of a number of historic European and early Native American activities.

61 | The same 1978 law that created the BWCAW also designated the BWCAW as a Mining  
62 | Protection Area. This designation prohibits exploration, lease, and exploitation of minerals in the  
63 | wilderness, and the prohibition of mineral exploration or exploitation on property owned by the  
64 | United States if that activity could materially change the wilderness characteristics of the  
65 | BWCAW (USHR 1978).

66 | Voyageurs National Park is adjacent to the BWCAW and is located approximately 50 miles  
67 | northwest of the NorthMet Project area (see Figure 4.2.12-1). The National Park Service  
68 | manages nearly 127,500 acres of park lands designated for wilderness study. The BWCAW and  
69 | Voyageurs National Park are contiguous with Canada's Quetico Provincial Wilderness Park.  
70 | Together, these three areas represent 2.39 million acres of managed wilderness area.



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**Figure 4.2.12-1**  
**Wilderness and Special Designation Areas**  
 NorthMet Mining Project and Land Exchange PSDEIS  
 Minnesota

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73 | **4.2.12.1.2 Established and Candidate Research Natural Areas**

74 The Forest Service designates and manages RNAs and cRNAs for the purpose of preserving and  
75 maintaining areas for ecological research, observation, genetic conservation, monitoring, and  
76 educational activities (USFS 2004b). The RNAs may serve as baseline or reference areas for  
77 comparison to other similar ecosystems that are subject to a wider range of management  
78 activities. They also provide opportunities for low-impact activities designed to educate people  
79 about ecological processes. No recreation facilities are provided. Dispersed recreation use occurs  
80 but is generally discouraged. The cRNAs are managed in similar fashion to the RNAs, with the  
81 exception that semi-primitive, non-motorized recreation is permitted.

82 Three RNAs are within 25 miles of the NorthMet Project area: the Big Lake – Seven Beavers  
83 cRNA, the Keeley Creek RNA, and the Dragon Lake cRNA.

84 **The Big Lake – Seven Beavers Area** includes an excellent representation of a variety of  
85 characteristic upland and lowland plant communities, dominated by wetland communities  
86 including lowland black spruce, lowland cedar, shrub swamp, and bog, connected to Sand Lake  
87 Peatland SNA (managed by the MDNR). The 5,599 acres of the cRNA are located  
88 approximately 12 miles east of the NorthMet Project area (USFS 2011h) (see Figure 4.2.12-1).  
89 This cRNA (and adjacent Sand Lake Peatland SNA) is located within the Headwaters Site,  
90 which is an area of ecological significance. Due to high biodiversity, low disturbance, and the  
91 size and complexity of the peatlands present on the site, it is considered a blueprint for natural  
92 resource management in the Laurentian Uplands subsection.

93 **Keeley Creek Natural Area**, located within the Superior National Forest in Stony River  
94 Township, approximately 25 miles northeast of the NorthMet Project area (see Figure 4.2.12-1),  
95 comprises 640 acres designated as an RNA within a larger 1,180-acre area designated as a  
96 national natural landmark. The Keeley Creek area contains a large tract of undisturbed mixed  
97 pine and black spruce forest with rare mature jack pine stands and significant upland bogs (USFS  
98 2011h).

99 **Dragon Lake** is located approximately 25 miles northeast of the NorthMet Project area (see  
100 Figure 4.2.12-1). The cRNA comprises 2,075 acres of old growth red pine, upland and lowland  
101 black spruce, wetland bog, and wetland shrub swamp communities, as well as former Isabella  
102 pinery (USFS 2011h).

103 | **4.2.12.1.3 Unique Biological Areas**

104 UBAs are designated by the USFS for their outstanding biological and other special values and  
105 managed within the USFS land and natural resource management plans. The common thread to  
106 these areas is that they exhibit plant communities, associations, and/or individual species of  
107 particular interest. UBAs are primarily managed for interpretive purposes. None are suitable for  
108 timber management. The Dry Mesic Jack Pine/Black Spruce and Lowland Conifer Landscape  
109 Ecosystems dominate this area in the Superior National Forest. UBAs are protected from actual  
110 or potential damage due to public use. Dispersed recreation use may occur, but is generally  
111 discouraged, and may be limited to bird watching, orienteering, fishing, hunting, berry picking,  
112 plant identification, and wildlife viewing (USFS 2004b).

113 UBAs within the 25-mile vicinity of the NorthMet Project area include the Little Isabella River  
114 UBA (approximately 25 miles east of the NorthMet Project area) and the Harris Lake National  
115 Natural Landmark (approximately 20 miles northeast of the NorthMet Project area) (USFS

116 2004b) (see Figure 4.2.12-1). National Natural Landmark sites are designated by the Secretary of  
117 the Interior as sites that contain outstanding biological and geological resources, based on their  
118 outstanding condition, illustrative value, rarity, diversity, and value to science and education.

119 **4.2.12.1.4 National Historic Landmark**

120 National Historic Landmarks are nationally significant places designated by the Secretary of the  
121 Interior as possessing exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting US heritage. The  
122 Soudan Iron Mine has been designated as a National Historic Landmark. It is known as the  
123 state's oldest and deepest iron mine and now hosts the Soudan Underground Laboratory. It  
124 resides within the Soudan Underground Mine State Park, located approximately 18 miles  
125 northwest of the NorthMet Project area, near Tower, on the southern shore of Lake Vermilion  
126 (see Figure 4.2.12-1). The park comprises approximately 1,300 acres and receives more than  
127 33,000 visitors annually (MDNR 2011o).

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129 **4.2.12.1.5 National Recreation Trail**

130 National Recreation Trails are designated by the Secretary of Interior or the Secretary of  
131 Agriculture to recognize exemplary trails of local and regional significance. The Taconite State  
132 Trail is designated as a National Recreation Trail and managed by the MDNR. Running from  
133 Grand Rapids to the Arrowhead State Trail, the Taconite State Trail is 165 miles long. A  
134 segment of the trail is 15 to 17 miles north of the NorthMet Project area, running from the City  
135 of Ely westward to Tower (see Figure 4.2.12-1). Spur trails run south from this segment into the  
136 City of Babbitt, and then east and west. The trail provides year-round opportunities for hiking,  
137 biking, snowmobiling, in-line skating, and other recreational uses (MDNR 2011p).

138 **4.2.12.2 State Managed Areas**

139 Like the federal government, the Minnesota also designates and manages for wilderness value a  
140 number of areas.

141 **Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness**

142 In 2003 Minnesota designated 18,000 acres of state lands within the Boundary Waters Canoe  
143 Wilderness as state wilderness. These are state forest lands that are described as an inholding  
144 within the federally designated wilderness. The definition of wilderness used by the state is  
145 similar to that set forth in the U.S. Wilderness Act. Legislation passed in 1975 established the  
146 state's wilderness program. Minnesota Statutes 2006, Chapter 86A.05, subdivision 6 contains  
147 management guidelines for wilderness areas. However the state lands now designated as state  
148 wilderness are using the management directions of the larger BWCAW and there is no state  
149 wilderness management plan for the area (Propst and Dawson 2008)

150 **4.2.12.2.1 Scenic Byway**

151 Minnesota Scenic Byways are roads that feature many of Minnesota's finest cultural, historic,  
152 natural, recreational, archaeological, and cultural locations and landscapes. The Superior  
153 National Forest Scenic Byway (Forest Highway 11) is a 54-mile long scenic roadway that runs  
154 from Aurora to Silver Bay, with the closest segment approximately 9 miles southeast of the  
155 NorthMet Project area along County Route 110 (see Figure 4.2.12-1). It is designated as a scenic  
156 byway by the State of Minnesota. The majority of the Byway runs through the Superior National  
157 Forest, offering access to hiking trails, historic sites, and the Superior National Forest itself. A  
158 key feature of the Byway is the opportunity it provides travelers to views of 250-year-old stands  
159 of white pine (US Department of Transportation [DOT] 2011). Skibo Vista Scenic Overlook is  
160 one of the other key features along the Superior National Forest Scenic Byway. See Section  
161 4.2.11 for further information about visual resources at the Skibo Vista Scenic Overlook.

162 **4.2.12.2.2 State Parks**

163 Soudan Underground Mine State Park is located 18 miles northwest (see Figure 4.2.12-1) of the  
164 NorthMet Project area and is home to Minnesota's oldest iron ore mine. The park covers 1,322  
165 acres and has 5 miles of hiking trails. The park is located on a ridge on the south shore of Lake  
166 Vermilion and offers a combination of recreational opportunities, including picnicking, hiking,  
167 snowmobiling, and tours of a former iron ore mine. There are stands of white and Norway  
168 pine—mixed with some balsam, aspen, and birch—that cover the upland areas. The lowlands are

169 dominated by white cedar interspersed with balsam, tamarack, black spruce, ash and muskeg  
170 (MDNR 2011o).

171 Lake Vermilion State Park is 16 miles northwest of the NorthMet Project area (see Figure  
172 4.2.12-1), on the eastern shores of Lake Vermilion adjacent to Soudan Underground Mine State  
173 Park. Lake Vermilion is just south of the Superior National Forest and BWCAW. The park is  
174 Minnesota's newest state park, open since 2010 for recreation opportunities such as hiking,  
175 snowshoeing, snowmobiling, and geocaching. It is the first major state park built in Minnesota in  
176 more than 30 years. Construction is underway for boat docks, fishing platforms, picnic shelters,  
177 roads, parking areas, and a paved bike route that will connect to the Mesabi Trail (MDNR  
178 2012f).

179 Bear Head Lake State Park, which covers 5,685 acres, is located 11 miles north of the NorthMet  
180 Project area, just south of the BWCAW (see Figure 4.2.12-1). The woods are made up of red and  
181 white pine, spruce, paper birch, and fir on the highlands and tamarack, black spruce, and white  
182 cedar on the lowlands. Small, clear trout lakes similar to those found in the BWCAW provide  
183 recreational opportunities such as fishing, swimming, and boating. The park also offers 17 miles  
184 of hiking trails, campgrounds, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, and snowshoeing (MDNR  
185 2012a).

186 Iron Range Off-Highway Vehicle State Park is located 17 miles southwest of the NorthMet  
187 Project area in Gilbert, Minnesota (see Figure 4.2.12-1). The park offers 36 miles of off-highway  
188 vehicle trails over 4,064 acres (MDNR 2012b).

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