

1 **5.2.12 Wilderness and Other Special Designation Areas**

2 Designations such as Wilderness or RNAs emphasize higher restrictions on human activity and
3 access, while other designations, such as historic landmarks or scenic byways, emphasize
4 management that seeks to enhance public enjoyment of certain spaces. Evaluating ~~gon of~~ the
5 effects on each type of designation considered how each set of characteristics or management
6 objectives would be ~~fundamentally~~ changed by the NorthMet Project Proposed Action or the
7 project alternatives. Potential effects could ~~be occur due to from~~ mining activity ~~or due to , or~~
8 ~~from anticipated~~ changes in other human activity resulting from in areas in or near to wilderness
9 or special designation areas due to the presence of the mining activity. No specific issues related
10 to wilderness or special designations area were identified during public scoping. As discussed in
11 Section 4.2.12, for the purposes of this analysis, the term “wilderness” is defined by the
12 Wilderness Act of 1964 (Public Law 88-577) (16 USC 1131-1136) of 1964. In its planning,
13 management and monitoring, the USFS identifies four characteristics of wilderness character, as
14 defined in the Wilderness Act: Untrammeled, Undeveloped, Natural, and Solitude or a
15 Primitive and Unconfined Type of Recreation.

16 **Summary**

17 The NorthMet Project Proposed Action would have no direct effects on wilderness or special
18 designation areas. Air quality and water quality in these areas would be virtually unchanged from
19 existing conditions; distance from activities associated with the NorthMet Project Proposed
20 Action would leave ambient noise levels also unchanged. The absence of these direct effects
21 means that there would be no indirect effects on wildlife, vegetation, or aquatic species. There
22 could be a minimal effect on the Skibo Vista Scenic Outlook along the Superior National Forest
23 Scenic Byway and therefore an associated indirect effect on recreation.

24 **5.2.12.1 Methodology and Evaluation Criteria**

25 This section uses data presented in Section 4.2.12 for all wilderness or special designation areas
26 (including state parks) within a 25-mile radius of the NorthMet Project area. While no direct
27 effects on wilderness character are anticipated due to changes in air quality, water quality or
28 noise, recreation opportunities could be indirectly affected because of a small change in visual
29 character.

30 For land that is or would be controlled by the USFS, the recreation evaluation criteria of the ROS
31 system were used to determine indirect project effects (see Section 5.2.11.1.1).

32 **5.2.12.2 NorthMet Project Proposed Action**

33 Table 5.2.12-1 lists the Wilderness and Other Special Designation Areas within 25 miles of the
34 NorthMet Project area and indicates significant features that have the most bearing on the
35 potential effects of the NorthMet Project Proposed Action.

36 **5.2.12.2.1 Federally Managed Areas**

37 **Table 5.2.12.2.1-1 Wilderness and Other Special Designation Areas ~~within 25 miles of~~**
 38 **~~the~~located within or Adjacent to the NorthMet Project Proposed Action**

Special Designation Area	Distance (miles) to the	
	NorthMet Project	Proposed Action
Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness	25	Laurentian Divide
Voyageurs National Park	20	Laurentian Divide
State Parks	-	-
Soudan Underground Mine State Park	18	Watershed, topography, vegetation
Lake Vermilion State Park	16	Watershed, topography, vegetation
Iron Range Off Highway State Park	14	Watershed, topography, vegetation
Bear Head Lake State Park	17	Watershed, topography, vegetation
Research Natural Areas		
Big Lake-Seven Beavers cRNA	12	Watershed, topography, vegetation
Keeley Creek RNA	25	Watershed, topography, vegetation
Dragon Lake cRNA	25	Watershed, topography, vegetation
Unique Biological Areas		
Little Isabella River UBA	25	Watershed, topography, vegetation
Harris Lake National Natural Landmark	20	Watershed, topography, vegetation
National Historic Landmark		
Soudan Iron Mine	18	Topography, vegetation
National Scenic Byway	-	-
Superior National Forest Scenic Byway	9	Topography, vegetation
National Recreation Trail		
Taconite State Trail	15-17	Topography, vegetation

39 The table shows that all of the ~~special~~federally managed areas are well removed from project
 40 activities and generally would be screened by intervening topography and vegetation.

41 The NorthMet Project Proposed Action has demonstrated that effects associated with Class I
 42 Increment, visibility and sulfur dioxide effects on flora and fauna were all well below their
 43 respective significance levels at all Class I areas, including the BWCAW and Voyageurs
 44 National Park. In addition, all sulfur dioxide and sulfur deposition relating to terrestrial and
 45 aquatic settings were well below “green light” significance levels in these areas. Total nitrogen
 46 deposition effects approach their significance levels at the BWCAW (see Section 5.2.7.2.2).

47 Due to the presence of the Laurentian Divide, there will be no direct effects to waters of the
 48 BWCAW or Voyageurs National Park. The NorthMet Project area is in the Lake Superior Basin,
 49 while these two Class I areas are to the northeast of the Laurentian Divide where streams and
 50 rivers flow to the Hudson Bay Basin.

51 As described in Section 5.2.8, daytime noise standards for sensitive receptors would not be
 52 reached beyond 0.84 mile from the Mine Site and 0.47-5 mile from the Plant Site. The nighttime
 53 noise standards would not be exceeded beyond 2.3 miles from the Mine Site and 1.5 miles from
 54 the Plant site. The BCWAW and Voyageurs National Park, as well as the rest of the specially
 55 designated areas within 25 miles of the NorthMet Project area are all located at distances much
 56 greater than these ranges and so would not be expected to be directly affected by NorthMet
 57 Project Proposed Action-related noise. Nighttime views from the BCWAW toward the NorthMet

58 Project area and nearby towns are such that light from the NorthMet Project Proposed Action
 59 would be indistinguishable from other sources of illumination.

60 ~~Topography and vegetation screen the parks from view of the activities within NorthMet Project~~
 61 ~~area, so there would be no direct effects on visual resources and no indirect effects on~~
 62 ~~recreation.~~ The RNAs, cRNAs, and UBAs are also in watersheds not affected by the NorthMet
 63 Project Proposed Action so there will be no direct or indirect effects on surface water or
 64 groundwater in these areas. Topography and vegetation again screen these areas from view of the
 65 NorthMet Project Proposed Action-related activities so there are no direct effects on visual
 66 resources or indirect effects on recreation.

67 By virtue of distance as well as topography and vegetation, the Taconite State Trail will
 68 experience neither direct nor indirect effects from the NorthMet Project Proposed Action.

69 By virtue of distance, topography, watershed, or vegetation none of the four characteristics of
 70 Wilderness character defined above (untrammled, undeveloped, natural, and solitude or a
 71 primitive and unconfined type of recreation) will be affected by the NorthMet Project Proposed
 72 Action.

73 **5.2.12.2.2 State Managed Areas**

74 Table 5.2.12-2 shows that all of the state managed areas are well removed from project activities
 75 and generally would be screened by intervening topography and vegetation.

77 **Table 5.2.12.2-2-1 Wilderness and Other Special Designation Areas located within or**
 78 **Adjacent to the NorthMet Project Proposed Action**

<u>Special Designation Area</u>	<u>Distance (miles) to the NorthMet Project Proposed Action</u>	<u>Significant Feature</u>
<u>Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>Laurentian Divide</u>
<u>State Parks</u>		
<u>Soudan Underground Mine State Park</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>Watershed, topography, vegetation</u>
<u>Lake Vermilion State Park</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>Watershed, topography, vegetation</u>
<u>Iron Range Off-Highway State Park</u>	<u>11</u>	<u>Watershed, topography, vegetation</u>
<u>Bear Head Lake State Park</u>	<u>17</u>	<u>Watershed, topography, vegetation</u>
<u>National Historic Landmark</u>		
<u>Soudan Iron Mine</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>Topography, vegetation</u>
<u>National Scenic Byway</u>		
<u>Superior National Forest Scenic Byway</u>	<u>9</u>	<u>Topography, vegetation</u>

79
 80 ~~The (Table 5.2.12.2-1 shows that all of the state managed areas are well removed from project~~
 81 ~~activities and generally would be screened by intervening topography and vegetation.~~

82 All of the state parks have been shown to be in areas where predicted concentrations are below
 83 secondary air standards that are designed to protect public welfare, including decreased visibility
 84 and damage to animals, crops, and vegetation. None of the state parks are within watersheds
 85 potentially affected by the NorthMet Project Proposed Action so there are neither direct effects
 86 on water quality nor indirect effects on aquatic species or wetlands.

87 | Topography and vegetation screen the parks from view of the activities within NorthMet Project
88 | area, so there would be no direct effects on visual resources and no indirect effects on recreation.

89 | The Superior National Forest Scenic Byway is at a distance where it is unaffected by project-
90 | related noise. Similar to other specially designated resources, there will be no direct or indirect
91 | effects due to air quality or water quality. Most of the Byway is screened from view of the
92 | NorthMet Project Proposed Action by topography and vegetation. However, from Skibo Vista
93 | Scenic Overlook, which is approximately 12 miles south-southwest of the Mine Site, a portion of
94 | the stockpiles would be visible above the treeline. This direct effect would also mean a
95 | potentially small indirect effect on recreation.

96 | By virtue of distance, topography, watershed, or vegetation none of the four characteristics of
97 | Wilderness character defined above (untrammled, undeveloped, natural, and solitude or a
98 | primitive and unconfined type of recreation) will be affected by the NorthMet Project Proposed
99 | Action.

100 | **5.2.12.3 NorthMet Project No Action Alternative**

101 | Under the NorthMet Project No Action Alternative, the NorthMet Project Proposed Action
102 | would not be developed. The NorthMet Project No Action Alternative presents no anticipated
103 | effect on the BWCAW, Voyageurs National Park, Established and Candidate RNAs, UBAs,
104 | National Historic Landmarks, the Superior National Forest Scenic Byway, and a National
105 | Recreation Trail, as the Mine Site and portions of the federal lands would continue to be
106 | managed in the same way they have been.

