

1 **5.3.12 Wilderness and Other Special Designation Areas**

2 This section describes the potential environmental consequences of the Land Exchange Proposed
3 Action on wilderness and other special designation area resources that are on or near the federal
4 and non-federal lands.

5 The Land Exchange Proposed Action would not result in a net increase or decrease in any
6 wilderness areas. However, the Land Exchange Proposed Action would result in a net increase of
7 306.9 acres of cRNAs to the federal estate. Land Exchange Alternative B would result in the
8 same net changes as the Land Exchange Proposed Action.

9 The Land Exchange No Action Alternative would not affect wilderness or special-designation
10 areas as the Land Exchange would not occur.

11 **5.3.12.1 Methodology and Evaluation Criteria**

12 An evaluation was conducted to determine the potential effect that the Land Exchange Proposed
13 Action would have on the wilderness character of the area. Potential effects on noise, water
14 resources, and recreation and visual resources were evaluated. The analysis of the wilderness
15 character affected by the Land Exchange Proposed Action was guided by evaluation criteria that
16 were developed by the USFS and other Co-lead Agencies.

17 Estimated ambient noise levels at each of the sensitive receptor sites adjacent to the federal lands
18 were compared with modeled noise levels to determine effects. An appropriate noise propagation
19 model was used to generate noise contours from the Mine Site and Plant Site. To determine
20 effects on water resources, in addition to available information from field efforts already
21 performed by PolyMet for the NorthMet Project Proposed Action, analysis of air photos and
22 available GIS layers for federal and non-federal lands included data layers and other collected
23 data such as NWI maps, soil maps/ecological land type maps, and FEMA floodplain maps.
24 Scenic quality and integrity of lands being acquired and conveyed was determined based on
25 desktop study and limited field observations where necessary. The Forest Plan uses a nationally
26 recognized classification system, the ROS, to describe different recreation settings, opportunities,
27 and experiences. Reviewing existing information and consultation with area land managers
28 provided the information needed to understand the existing and potential recreation
29 opportunities.

30 **5.3.12.2 Land Exchange Proposed Action**

31 The Land Exchange Proposed Action would result in a net increase of cRNAs to the federal
32 estate. As indicated in Section 5.3.1, the USFS has determined that Tract 1 would have the
33 following management area designations: General Forest and cRNA. Therefore, the Land
34 Exchange Proposed Action would include the Pike Mountain and Loka Lake cRNAs (southwest
35 corner and northeast corner of the tract, respectively). The addition of Tract 1 into the federally
36 managed areas would extend the Pike Mountain cRNA by 135.7 acres of primarily hardwoods
37 plant community, and would extend the Loka Lake cRNA by 171.2 acres of lowland black
38 spruce and tamarack swamp. The remaining 4,619.3 acres would be allocated to General Forest.

39 Tracts 2, 3, 4, and 5 would not result in a net change to wilderness or other special designation
40 areas.

41 **5.3.12.3 ~~Land Exchange No Action Alternative~~**

42 ~~Under the Land Exchange No Action Alternative, the Superior National Forest would have an~~
43 ~~ongoing responsibility for managing the wilderness and other special designations on or near the~~
44 ~~federal lands in accordance with the Forest Plan. The Land Exchange No Action Alternative~~
45 ~~would not change the USFS's responsibility for managing these resources and would result in no~~
46 ~~further effects on existing wilderness areas or other special designated areas.~~

47 **5.3.12.4 Land Exchange Alternative B**

48 The Land Exchange Alternative B would result in the same net increase of cRNAs to the federal
49 estate as the Land Exchange Proposed Action. The Land Exchange Alternative B would not
50 result in a net change to any wilderness area.

51 **5.3.12.5 Land Exchange No Action Alternative**

52 Under the Land Exchange No Action Alternative, the Superior National Forest would have an
53 ongoing responsibility for managing the wilderness and other special designations on or near the
54 federal lands in accordance with the Forest Plan. The Land Exchange No Action Alternative
55 would not change the USFS's responsibility for managing these resources and would result in no
56 further effects on existing wilderness areas or other special designated areas.

DRAFT