February 2, 2015

Letter to the Editor

I write in response to an article written by Steve Piragis of Ely – "*A Day of action for BWCA* [Boundary Waters Canoe Area] *lovers and mining opponents*" – that appeared in the Star Tribune on Tuesday, January 27. Mr. Piragis and his wife Nancy, own Piragis Northwoods Co. and a canoe outfitting business based in Ely, Minnesota.

Mr. Piragis wrote:

"Not only has the Boundary Waters continued to serve as awe inspiring terrain for our nations citizens, it also has been a large economic driver for the tourism economy of Northeastern Minnesota, one that generates $800 million in revenue and supports more than 18,000 local jobs annually."

Readers should know that the figures Mr. Piragis cites are based on an Iron Range Resources and Rehabilitation Board (IRRRB) report from 2009 that included statistics from the Minnesota Department of Revenue for 7 counties including St. Louis, Crow Wing, Itasca, Cook, Lake, Koochiching and Aitkin counties. Although Mr. Piragis implies that the revenue and jobs were produced locally, this is definitely not the case since the data included 7 counties and all of the cities located therein, including the City of Duluth.

Unemployment and underemployment occurs in many of the communities in Northeastern Minnesota. Two sectors of employment vital to the Iron Range – construction and trade/transportation/utilities, showed a loss of employment during the last 12 months. The Duluth-Superior metro area is the only metro area in the state that has shown a job loss during the last 12 months. (January, 2015 News Release/Department of Employment and Economic Development).

Mr. Piragis's assertions that the local economy generates $800 million dollars in revenue and supports 18,000 jobs is a clumsy attempt to distort the facts in order to support his argument opposing proposed copper-nickel mining in Northeastern Minnesota.

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