



"SLSA Receives Grant to Protect Minnesota's Waters"

Freshwater Future based in Petoskey, Michigan has granted SLSA over \$5000 to aid us in protecting Lake Superior and its watershed in Minnesota. With our co-grantee, Save Our Sky Blue Waters, we will hire technical experts to provide information for effective comments on the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement for the PolyMet Northmet copper-nickel project near Hoyt Lakes. We hope for a large turnout of citizens to comment on this project description and will provide both standard comment letters and fact sheets to support comments by our members and others.

Concerned citizens and environmental groups effectively encouraged the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources to require the company to develop this second draft plan that must describe improvements in the mine design that will prevent the emission of dangerous mercury and toxic metals into ground and surface waters, principally the St. Louis River and watershed. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency graded the first plan as grossly inadequate to protect our air and water.

The environmental threats from this type of mining cannot be weighed on the same scale as financial promises. The net long term effect on the economy and public health in the Northeastern Minnesota would be negative. Once the hard rock is ground into a fine powder for the metal removal process, the potential for toxic pollution is irreversible. Acid mine drainage eventually occurs when the waste is exposed to air and water and the toxic metals and sulfates drain out into the watershed basically forever. The jobs leave but the pollution remains.

Thank you to [Freshwater Future](#), [Save Our Sky Blue Waters](#) and the [Center for Biological Diversity](#).

LeRoger Lind



"Nuclear waste here? Actually, why not?"

Such was the jolting headline on the Opinion page of the Duluth-News Tribune on Thursday, January 5, 2012. That attitude fits well with those who promote the precept that pollution of our rivers and lakes resulting from sulfide mining is an acceptable price to pay in order to provide jobs.

The newspaper goes on to say, "...let's consider what the scientists have to say. The let's talk about charging astronomical rents to store the stuff." While the editorial piece stops short of outright endorsement of dumping the hazardous, incredibly long lived waste deep within our soil, it posits "let's not say no just yet."

We must ask whether scientists can guarantee that the stability of our rock formation is impermeable, that there's no danger whatever that fractures would ever leak the radioactive fluid into Lake Superior or other underground water sources.

Our second major concern is for the dangers inherent with the transport of the waste from our multiple nuclear power plants to our area. If moved through the Great Lakes by boat there would surely be a risk of a maritime disaster resulting in unspeakable damage, especially so if a mishap occurred in Lake Superior. Train or truck transport would also pose a great risk to public health in that accidents on route could not be ruled out...and the shipment spilled into an unprotected environment!

Unlike the News-Tribune, we find no comfort in the Sandia National Laboratory study on how it was impressed with the lack of earthquakes or volcanoes in the Lake Superior region in "millions of years."

The Opinion page article concludes, "This makes us perfect----absolutely perfect." This cavalier attitude raises the question as to whether the land and water of our region has already suffered vastly more than enough abuse and can absorb no more.

Sulfuric acid isn't the only problem mining creates!

By Range environmentalist Elanne Palcich

I believe we need a moratorium on sulfide mining--we don't want the mining of this low-grade, highly disseminated mineralization to destroy what is left of NE Minnesota and the Arrowhead--both the land and the water.

We can also stress that the mining of such low-grade ores uses a tremendous amount of energy resources (blasting, hauling, crushing, semi-processing, raiing, shipping--plus the electric energy needed for the plant--plus hauling in all the chemicals needed in the process--plus the huge amount of energy that it takes to produce the gigantic mining equipment).

Why aren't we looking at the whole picture? How can we ever find alternatives when we keep promoting consumerism and resource extraction at all costs?

Taconite mining was given a boost with the taconite tax amendment of 1964, which allowed the taconite industry to pay a low production tax (in lieu of property taxes) in order to be competitive. As a result, the mining companies have accumulated billions of dollars that have totally left the state. What they have left behind instead are huge holes, a polluted environment, and a state budget deficit.

We just don't learn the lessons. Nonferrous mining needs to be stopped before it starts. Period.

They can't be serious—the Wisconsin Iron Mining Bill borders on the laughable!

There was no humor to be heard, however, from many speaking against the Gogebic Taconite mining on an immense spread of wilderness in the Penokee Range in Ashland and Iron Counties.

We can understand their outrage. The Clean Wisconsin environmental group, active for more than 40 years, listed what it claims “silences the voice of the public.” It cites these examples.

If approved by the legislature it would ;

1. remove citizen rights to sue for illegal environmental damage,
2. Cap the amount a mining company must pay to Wisconsin to analyze its permit, leaving the public to pay the rest of the bill.
3. The company's obligation to clean up the site when mining ends would be cut from 40 years, as required by current law, to just 20 years. Another major concession to the industry would be an okay to dump toxic mine waste into sensitive wetlands and flood plains and wouldn't stop the contamination of groundwater of adjacent properties.

4. Perhaps the most blatant and damaging feature of AB 426 would be an allowance that would give iron mining law precedence over all other environmental regulations.

And this final staggering fact; according to the Clean Wisconsin news release the Gogebic Taconite project, if approved, could use as much as 41 million gallons of water each day, more than the daily water use of the entire city of Madison.

In our opinion, Iron Mining Bill AB 426 should be dead on arrival in the legislature or, at the very least, undergo a complete makeover with full involvement of the public.



Aquaculture appears to be on a slow track...thankfully

Sea Grant of Minnesota should be commended for not promoting the creation of fish farms around the Great Lakes, though such efforts have been made by commercial interests. Sea Grant says aquaculture in the Great Lakes has not met expectations because of problems associated with climate, production technologies, selecting the appropriate species, marketing, competition from outside the region, and business planning.

SLSA concurs with the agency's concern for the possibility of the escape into the Great Lakes genetically modified organisms. An unintended release of fish diseases and a spread of invasive species could also happen...and we certainly have an overabundance of them already.

Sea Grant sees it as a challenge to develop and promote environmentally acceptable and economically viable aquaculture techniques, especially for the Great Lakes.

Update!

Here's an update on the efforts of an east coast congressman, Frank LaBiondo, to exempt control of ballast dumping from the regulations promulgated by the Clean Water Act. The New Jersey Republican lawmaker said his bill's purpose is to establish a single standard. This was a reference to actions of some Great Lake states, New York among them, to try to impose their individual set of rules.

Our board member, Lori Andresen, tracked La Biondo's bill and found that the Commercial Vessel Discharge Reform Act of 2011 did get House approval and was then "rolled into the Coast Guard & Maritime Transportation Act and referred to the Senate Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation."

As noted in the previous issue of the newsletter, Rep. Chip Cravaak, told the Duluth News Tribune, "The New York (ballast) regulations would place excessive, unattainable water quality standards on commercial vessels. Right now we should be doing everything we can to encourage growth of our maritime industry---not the opposite."

The next victim of acid rain?...Sugar Maples around the Great Lakes.

In the December, 2011 issue of the Journal of applied Ecology it was noted that acid rain had, until now, been given little attention. Our maples in western Lake Superior had not been seriously impacted as had those around the lower lakes. Those in the northeast had been in a gradual decline for the past 40 years due largely to the high acid content in the soils of that area. Our trees, on the other hand, had natural protection from the buffering effect of soil rich in calcium.

Now, the sugar maple seedlings are falling victim to the buildup of excessive nitrogen.. That, in turn, hampers the decay of the tree's leaves after they drop to the ground and new trees are seen in lower numbers as the result. The prognosis for the coming years is depressing—increased burning of fossil fuels will likely cause a spread worldwide by the end of this century. The forecasts suggests the rise in nitrogen content in the earth is up by 50%.

Is NE Minnesota at risk of becoming the New Appalachia?

In the frenetic drive by industry to tap into the alleged plethora of commercially viable minerals beneath the primeval forests and lakes of northeastern Minnesota, and with the clamor to "create jobs at any cost" to the environment, are we approaching a critical moment of decision to place a modicum of controls on such developments?

Is there not a pressing need to stand back and consider whether the mining industry, not deep concerns based on the integrity of our land and water, will eventually scarify a nearly unlimited percentage of our wild country?

Can we realistically conceive of a time in the future when industry, the DNR, Iron Range legislators, the Department of Business Development or labor unions will conclude further encroachment on the area of potential profits would destroy the cherished character and intrinsic value of our lakes and forests? You know the answer! Nobody is looking after the store, so to speak.

In my humble opinion, this is the most propitious moment for the environmental community to work toward convincing the public and legislators of the vital need for an oversight committee; one without ties to mining interests, the DNR, chambers of commerce, Steelworkers Union, etc.

Ideally, it would circumvent the influence of the mining industry and its biased supporters and report to the governor in addition to releasing its findings on a given issue to the news media and the general public. Of necessity, it would function in an advisory capacity.

I can envision a committee composed of members from the academic world, retired judges, perhaps members of the clergy and others with impeccable credentials in the arena intelligent, thoughtful conclusions deemed best for Minnesota.

Past experience tells us to expect a hue and cry such as "No. No. Not another regulatory agency in our already inflated government." We who advocate my concept would, of course, face an outpouring of negativity.

Understandably, you may find my proposal to be flawed and unrealistic, but I believe you will concur with the premise that we should do whatever we can to "stem the tide" of runaway development that mining of the "precious metals" is imposing on us.

Your thoughts and any alternative approaches to the basic problem will be much appreciated.

Sincerely, Glenn Maxham

Please see the address label for your membership expiration date.

With the speed of a sluggish snail, EPA moves on ballast issue.

Four years have now passed since the Environmental Protection Agency directed the shipping industry's ocean vessels plying the Great Lakes to empty their tanks before entering the Seaway. The clear intent of the directive was to enforce the Clean Water Act. Environmental groups quickly stepped forward to point out its latest tepid solution to halting further invasions of exotic species would be ineffective and insufficient.

Following an EPA meeting in Traverse City, Michigan last month, the agency set new standards that would (if the industry isn't successful in weakening the regulations) demand ships employ

technology to reduce at least some of the non-native fish, mussels and microorganisms harmful to our lakes. The EPA says it will accept public comment on the new draft permit over a period of 75 days later this year and the final document would not be released until November of 2012.

However, another year would pass until it becomes effective in 2013.

Don't expect the EPA to proceed with enthusiasm as it moves toward completion. According to the Associated Press, the EPA refused for years to set rules for ballast water under the Clean Water Act. It stated further that the agency complied only when forced to do so in response to law suits filed by environmentalists.

The EPA says it's on track now and that the new standard is expected to substantially reduce the risk of introduction and establishment of invasive species.

We already have become the home and breeding grounds for 180 exotic species, 2/3rds of them dumped from ballast water, and it now appears we must accept even more and be satisfied that only the rate of new arrivals will be slowed.

The Great Lakes Ports Association says the EPA plan sounds reasonable to its members...a view definitely not shared by the environmentalists who initiated the lawsuits forcing the EPA to quit dragging its anchor and adhere to the principles of the Clean Water Act.

Even if the Anew standards bring about the projected reduction of invasive species, the daunting problem of their interlake movement via the intake and discharge of ballast water by domestic ships remains. They are exempted from the new rules!



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Membership Dues

Please check your Newsletter mailing label for expiration date. If the year is not current, it needs to be updated. Membership dues increased January 1, 2010.

Repeat of new dues structure:

ALL EXCEPT LIFETIME ARE PER PERSON PER YEAR.

\$10 Fixed income	\$50 Sustaining	\$200 Lifetime
\$20 General	\$100 Benefactor	(per person)

The Lifetime option is only available to new members or members whose label is currently up-to-date.

Please designate your choice when you renew.

We appreciate your interest as well as your support.