



Save Lake Superior Association

Spring 2018

Dedicated to the restoration and preservation of this Great Lake

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The PolyMet Process – The Toxic Trojan Horse

Governor Dayton is gifting the Iron Range of Minnesota with a toxic Trojan horse. On October 23, 2017 he told the St. Paul Pioneer Press that he has moved from being "genuinely undecided" on the proposed PolyMet copper-nickel sulfide mine to being a "genuine supporter" of the project. He also noted, "Nothing of this magnitude is risk free...but I think it's a risk worth taking and I support the project."

At the receiving end of the risk would be Lake Superior and anyone living in the St. Louis River watershed of northeast Minnesota, including Cloquet, Carlton, Fond du Lac, Duluth, and neighboring Superior. According to PolyMet's own environmental review, water leaving the plant site would need to be treated for a least 500 years



after mine closure--into perpetuity. Also risking loss would be all those who recreate, fish, hunt, or own property in Minnesota's Arrowhead region, as a 6,500 acre tract of public Superior National Forest land--consisting of high quality wetlands, forests, and wildlife habitat--would be traded to PolyMet for their open pit sulfide mine. Additional acreage is destined to be impacted by mine activities and mine expansion.

Public Health Risks Ignored

The PolyMet process has ignored efforts to

include a public health analysis. Instead the process has downplayed the potential for Acid Mine Drainage and the leaching of toxic heavy metals--such as arsenic, mercury, copper, nickel, manganese, and lead. Heavy metals are neurotoxins, affecting brain development. Those most impacted by ingesting or breathing in such metals are pregnant and nursing mothers, infants, and young children. Apparently this is one of the risks that Governor Dayton feels is worth taking.

In fact, the issue of toxic air emissions from the proposed PolyMet mine has been marginalized, and toxic heavy metals in the water are addressed under adaptive management--whereby a problem will be addressed only after it occurs. A health risk assessment was never included in the environmental impact statement (EIS).

Inside the Trojan horse

PolyMet is only the first in line. Multinational corporations are waiting in the wings, ready to be part of a sulfide mine industrial zone in Minnesota's most vulnerable and valuable headwaters, in the heart of Superior National Forest. Exploration for copper-nickel and other metals is advancing through all of northeastern Minnesota, from the Boundary Waters to Lake Superior, and south to Carlton and Aitkin counties and along the Mississippi River.

In 2005, for pennies on the dollar, PolyMet purchased the former LTV crushing plant, tailings basin, and railroad grade, after the

taconite mine closed due to bankruptcy.

According to PolyMet, the processing plant has 2/3 excess capacity. Even before receiving any permit to mine, PolyMet has announced plans to increase its proposed daily tonnage and is already considering expansion possibilities (N1-43 Technical report on NorthMet Mine).

Use of the PolyMet plant and tailings basin would make it much easier for Teck Resources,

Encampment, and Twin Metals, whose deposits adjoin those of PolyMet, to get permits to mine in the future. Many of these deposits are in the Rainy River watershed. Twin Metals has said they would put much of their waste in the Lake Superior watershed, under the guise of protecting the Boundary Waters--thus polluting two internationally important watersheds.

Trading the forest for an open pit sulfide mine

PolyMet's open pit sulfide mining operations would take place on what is now protected Superior National Forest. The U.S. Forest Service could have denied PolyMet these surface lands, since the Weeks Act of 1911 does not allow such strip mining on U.S. forest land that was originally acquired for watershed protection. Instead, the Forest Service entered into a land exchange agreement with PolyMet that would exchange the high functioning bio-diverse forested wetlands of the proposed mine site for scattered pieces of non-federal land.

On March 27, 2017, eight environmental groups (including Save Lake Superior Association) representing national, state and local citizens submitted four separate lawsuits challenging the legality of the U.S. Forest



Service land exchange decision. Impacted citizens and groups have the legal right to challenge Federal agency decisions under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) as well as other laws.



Then on June 29, 8th District U.S. Congressman Rick Nolan introduced H.R. 3115, the Superior National Forest Land Exchange Act of 2017-- to circumvent the citizens' legal actions and due process rights and compel the Forest Service to complete the land exchange. The bill passed the House and is now in the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition, and Forestry. Both Senators Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith sit on the Ag Committee. As of April 14, in a WDIO TV interview, both senators announced they are seeking to get Nolan's bill passed in the Senate.

Conclusion

The permitting of PolyMet has never been about a single mine. It is about a toxic sulfide mining district extending from PolyMet to Birch Lake and beyond, ultimately polluting both the Lake Superior and Rainy River watersheds.

Our political leaders seem oblivious to the threats to our water and people from proposed sulfide mining, preferring instead to rely upon promises of yet-to-be-developed technologies to clean up a toxic load of heavy metals, sulfates, and other mining associated pollutants. They conveniently ignore the impacts to our land, the loss of wetlands and wildlife, and the loss of wild rice and fish as local high protein food sources and as part of Tribal rights. Concerns about the human health impacts of toxic heavy metals and pollution in our air and water are simply considered a sacrifice to a poisonous industrial mining zone.

We will soon find out what our two women senators are made of. They can promote

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Nolan's egregious bill, or they can follow the constitutionally established judicial involvement, allowing for citizen due process according to existing law. They can ignore the vast majority of Minnesota citizens who oppose PolyMet--or they can stand up for citizen's voices, concerns, and rights. As women in leadership positions, they should be aware of the words of Jane Goodall--..." the power [that] people currently have to 'leave a better world for our children' comes down to making ethical decisions."

Which path will Senators Amy Klobuchar and Tina Smith choose? Will they represent

the movement to restore honor to our political system, rather than overriding citizen rights? Will they consider the impacts of our decisions--upon future generations?

Will they choose to use their leadership roles in a way that will ultimately degrade the quality and value of water in two internationally important watersheds, affecting the lives of the next generations? Or will they stand up and protect the health and quality of our waters and environment, as well as the health of the children of the future? We are likely to find out before the 2018 elections. Make your voice heard by calling Senator Klobuchar at 202-224-3244 or Senator Smith at 202-224-5641.

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