



WHERE ARE THE PROTESTS AGAINST POLLUTION?

Young protestors should be focusing on the pollution as well as on the financial hijacking of our country by Wall Street and global corporations. It is obvious that the economic deck is stacked against the younger generations. It is less obvious and perhaps more ominous that current attacks against the Clean Water and Clean Air Acts on both the federal and state levels would erase decades of successful environmental protection. Our future health and prosperity depends as much upon clean water as it does upon gold bars.



The logic and urgency of the need for maintaining and improving environmental protections of our water and air was well stated at the recent Bad River Band Lake Superior watershed mining conference. Their reservation is threatened by water and air pollution from the proposed Gogebic Taconite mine in the Penoque Mountains overlooking Lake Superior. From a very basic perspective, a tribal elder posed, "What good are these jobs if we are all dead?" Call it overstated but this is the basic issue confronting all of us and our heirs in the Lake Superior watershed. Mining is projected to increase by three-fold over current levels in the next decade or so.

There is no public outcry to protect the environment equivalent to that of those currently railing against big government and big money. For their own wellbeing, the youth of this country must step forward and join all of us as advocates in order to be effective in protecting the environment. The quality is there but we also need quantity in participation. The future success of our country isn't all about money. Much of the pollution from new mining ventures would be irreversible and effective cleanup of the rest would be unaffordable.

Wild rice future remains vague but serious MPCA study advances.

A check with the MPCA following the October 11 Wild Rice Standards Study Committee failed to yield an insight on whether mining interests can force the lowering of the 1973 regulations to accommodate expected sulfate pollution from mining. The state agency did verify, however, that "Past studies have shown that elevated levels of sulfate were detrimental to the growth of wild rice so Minnesota adopted a standard in 1973 to protect this natural resource" and noted that "...water used for production of wild rice during periods when the rice may be susceptible to damage by high sulfate levels." Thus the 10/mg sulfate standard was established.

Though the degree of value of wild rice today has been questioned by some sources, the MPCA states "Wild Rice is an important component of aquatic communities in parts of Minnesota, particularly in northern Minnesota. It provides food for waterfowl and shelter for animals and fish. Wild Rice is also a very important cultural resource to many Minnesotans, and is economically important to those who harvest and market wild rice."

In recognizing a need for public input, the MPCA "would assemble and support a stakeholder group to ensure communications amongst interested parties is maintained, and would continue to consult with EPA and Tribal representatives." This would include sharing and discussing the study progress and results.

Though not specifically stated, we presume PolyMet and other companies hoping to mine sulfate-producing ore, will be among highly interested stakeholders. "Upon completion of the study, the MPCA will undertake a rulemaking to adjust (as needed) the sulfate standard based on the results of the (two year study.)"

SLSA's fear is that intense pressures may be applied to "adjust" the standards to relax the existing rules for the benefit of industry and to the detriment of the environment.

Incidentally, members attending the 42nd annual meeting of SLSA this fall learned a great deal about wild rice from speaker Annette Drewes, founder of the Save Our Rice Alliance. American and Canadian tribal members, research has revealed, have harvested this nutritious natural food for several thousand years.

Sarah Erickson, Education Director of the Great Lakes Aquarium, was our second speaker. She spoke of the facility's early years and elaborated on current programming and future plans appealing to those now in preschool and to other young people during Aquarium visits.

Invasive species are becoming the “hogs” of the Great Lakes

Aquatic scientists predicted six years ago that the ecosystems in the Great Lakes were on the “verge of collapse” and may soon be in that state due to several factors. The National Wildlife Federation recently stated that one of the principal factors is the presence of non-native mussels...the quagga and zebra species have multiplied to a degree great enough to filter immense amounts of nutrients there is little left for native aquatic life. That shortage is reflected in a sharp decline in lake-wide fish populations, especially on the lower lakes.

Paradoxically, an excess of nutrients from farm and garden runoff is overloading the near shores with fertilizer, mainly phosphates, is creating toxic algae blooms as thick as two feet in the western waters of Lake Erie! The algae blooms are not new to Lake Erie but have never been as serious as they currently are. The problem is compounded by the apparent return of an ecological dead zone in that lake. Simply stated, there’s too much food in the shallow water and a shortage out in the deep water. Accumulations of excessive algae were reported in Saginaw Bay in Lake Michigan and at Green Bay. The ingestion of these abnormal growths by birds and fish has led to incidents of die offs believed to be linked to poisoning from botulism.

The nutrient load in Lake Superior appears to be considerably less and the population of the foreign mussels remains relatively low but is still an ongoing concern here as well.

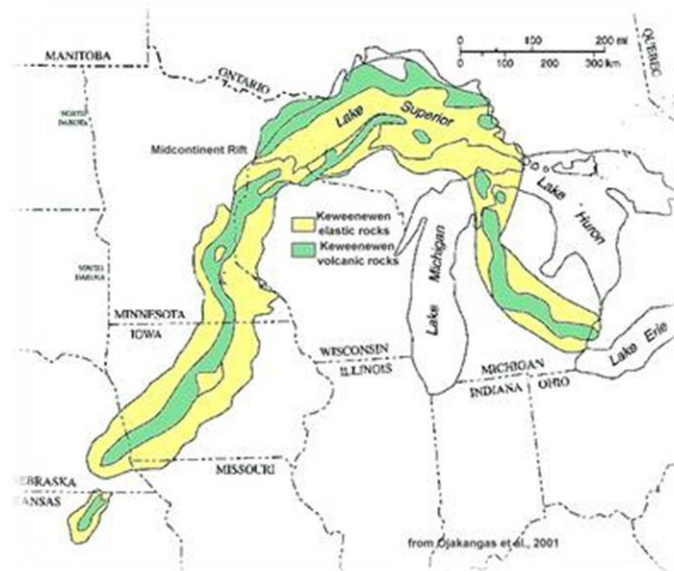
Duluth as a sea coast town? It could have happened way back when.

A billion years ago, molten basalt erupted from the Mid-continent Rift...a rift that extended from near Detroit and gravitated north through what is now Lake Superior to Minnesota and then south to Kansas. This eruption of lava went on for a long, long time...22 million years say today’s geologists as it was laying down an accumulation of molten rock as deep as ten miles.

The flow of lava from an underground cauldron caused the surface to sink while the earth’s crust parted. This is how the broad but shallow Lake Superior Basin was formed. Had the violent action continued to evolve, the North American continent would have split in two! This would have likely put Duluth on the shore of an ocean instead of a lake. (today’s ocean ships wouldn’t have had to bother with the St. Lawrence Seaway to come to the Twin Ports)

In the joint Sea Grant, UMD, MPCA and WLSSD publication Superior Pursuit, Facts About the Greatest Great Lake, it says that, “ ... the deep forces that fueled the rifting stopped, leaving behind the basalt-covered North Shore. The basin continued to sink, accumulating eroded sand and mud. Ancient rivers deposited the sand that became the Apostle Islands and the Bayfield Peninsula in Wisconsin.”

Of course we dearly love our beautiful fresh water lake....but wouldn't it have been nice to have a lobster, shrimp, scallops or sea bass dinner from our waterfront ?



Fears of iron mine pollution of Lake Superior in NW Wisconsin stir action at Bad River.

Members of this Chippewa band have initiated action to try to halt the proposed Gogebic Taconite company from creating a large open pit iron mining operation on the Penokee Range of Iron and Ashland Counties. In its first phase, four and a half miles of the forested range would be cleared.

The expected “bait” trotted out by the company to enroll public support is the promise of hundreds of jobs and revitalization of the area in exchange for revised state environmental regulations. As we have seen so frequently in proposed mining operations, companies lobby for regulations to fit the needs of the industry, not for sustaining the integrity of natural areas.

In a news conference in Madison preceding an appeal to the governor, the Bad River council member Frank Connors said, “ Our land is our culture, our history, which runs deep. We came here to protect it.”

The Band, with support from environmentalists, claims the mine operations would impact the Bad River watershed that drains into Lake Superior and also hurt air quality. It fears the sloughs and wetlands on the reservation would be ruined and damage done to the traditional wild rice functions. It also complains that the tribe was left out of discussions concerning the mine and its impact on Bad River.

The council will present to Governor Scott Walker a list of ten principals it hopes to see incorporated into any mining legislation. The tribal attorney, Glenn Stoddard, said, "We want to bring the debate down to the details, not the mantra of jobs."

Would you believe (or eat) Lake Superior Caviar?

Technically speaking, there is such a fish product from our lake. In fact, Minnesota Sea Grant reports that this month and next are key times for netting thousands of pounds of ciscos along the North Shore. From them will come the now very valuable fish eggs that will sell, to those with an appetite for caviar, for three dollars per ounce.

If a blindfold test were given to caviar gourmards, I wonder whether tasters would know the difference between the local delicacy and the famous Russian brands. In any case, the cisco eggs are selling well in Scandinavia, especially in Sweden.

When the ciscos (also known as lake herring) are brought ashore they likely go to the Dockside Fish Market in Grand Marais where they are hand-processed, salted, frozen and then quickly shipped overseas. A small amount goes to upscale restaurants in New York.

Dockside co-owner, Shele Tofte said the annual total she and her husband ship amounts to 65,000 pounds and that it's regarded as a mild brand because it's less salty than other brands

The growth of the caviar business for the Grand Marais company is due, to a great extent, to the decline of fish stocks in the waters of Scandinavia. There's been a sizeable comeback of herring in Lake Superior following over harvesting. 440,000 pounds were taken in 1926 but by 1946 the fishermen largely gave up netting then when the catch totaled a mere 1,000 pounds. By contrast, the rebound of lake trout is far from what it was in 1921 when 383,000 pounds were taken by commercial fishermen.

By 1961 only a thousand pounds were reported. Sadly, the DNR has spent millions in stocking non-native steelheads, cohos and other invasive salmonids while doing far less for the native species. The figures from the Great Lakes Fisheries Commission's Technical Report # 3 is even more depressing where walleyes in Lake Superior are concerned. In 1885 records show 125,000 pounds of this highly desired species were netted. In 1943 the bottom fell out of the market when the poundage registered zero!

Ballast discharge regulations may be trashed in the US House!

As this newsletter heads for the printer, the House of Representatives is to vote on whether a bill introduced by Representative Frank LoBiondo, R.-N.J., should exempt the control of the ship ballast dumping from needing a permit as has been required by the Clean Water Act.

Approval of the Commercial Vessel Discharges Reform Act would mirror the position of the International Maritime Organization and would certainly please owners of Great Lakes ships.

The U.S. Coast Guard and the Env. Protection Agency are due to soon release details of their respective regulations on ballast discharges. The New Jersey lawmaker maintains his bill is designed to establish a single standard on this contentious issue, an apparent reference to the various regulations proposed by some Great Lake states.

Our U.S. representative, Chip Cravaak, is quoted in the Duluth News Tribune as saying, "The New York regulations would place excessive, unattainable water quality standards on commercial vessels." He adds, "Right now we should be doing everything we can to encourage growth of our maritime industry—not the opposite."



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Understandably, environmental groups, including SLSA, are opposed to the "roll back regulations" bill and fear that the already serious infestation of invasive species will be exacerbated and be a setback for efforts to keep additional exotics out of the Great Lakes.

Mineral Leases delayed....again

Minnesota property owners are getting a "crash course" in the split estate, as many are having the land sold, literally from beneath their feet, within the rapidly expanding Duluth Complex Mining District. More than 80 cabin owners and residents received news this fall that their property (the mineral estate) is included in a state mineral lease sale. The leases are for a duration of 50 years and grants the lessee the rights to explore for, mine and remove metallic minerals. The lease includes full use of the surface of the land, though specifics must be negotiated with the owner. The lease holder also acquires the right to condemn a person's property, if they are unwilling to allow access for exploration. The drill rigs run for 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, for months and years at a time. Generally, there are no restrictions as to hours of operation or setbacks from places of habitation. It is against the current state law for a property owner to purchase the mineral estate from beneath their own property if it is owned by the state.

On October 5, angry property owners once again received a reprieve from Minnesota's Executive Council, who denied lease approvals for 6 months to give property owners a chance to work through the legislature toward reform of the outdated mining laws. Property owners testified loud and clear at the Executive Council meeting they were not interested in allowing for mineral exploration upon their properties. I don't blame them.

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New 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.