

Sulfide Mining Operation Concerns May Impact All of Upper Peninsula

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It would take about two years to build the mine, and five to seven to extract the unprocessed rock, Mr. Cherry said. After depletion of the ore, it will take another two years to close the mine.

Mr. Cherry stated that a high level of technology will go into the mine's construction.

"It's expensive to do it right," he said, "and we recognize that."

The ability to control sulfide mines, however, is questionable, according to Rusty Gowland, spokesman for an organization called Wolfpack, which focuses on creating balanced relationships between economic development and conservation. He contends that current sulfide mining technology is not advanced enough to justify Kennecott's project in Marquette and cited problems at a comparable mine in Flambeau, Wisconsin, where holes appeared in waste rock liners and materials leaked into the ground for two years before being discovered.

Furthermore, he said, most of the revenue produced by the project would leave the state without significantly benefiting local populations. Wildlife would also suffer, he added, and the recreational value of the land would be diminished, causing damage to industries based on tourism.

The most significant problem with allowing sulfide mining in Marquette, he said, is the potential for the mine to identify Michigan as a sulfide-mining region.

"This is a test case," he said. "The real issue is that there is a fault line rich in metals running beneath Michigan, Wisconsin, and Illinois, and Kennecott, as well as other mining companies, want to mine the whole string."

Jon Cherry said Kennecott has no plans for another mine, although the company continues to explore the region.

"This is about profit for foreign investors and not about jobs," Mr. Gowland said, "while U.P. residents bear the risks of water contamination, health problems, and the loss of jobs based on recreation."

"It is critical to understand that the state owns much of the land that Kennecott plans to mine," he said. "It may receive \$72 million through taxes and permits, and this is at a time when the state is in a budget crisis."

"Such a clearly flawed business plan," he said, "would make a cynical person in the U.P. conclude that money is flowing from this mine to the state and will be used

to help solve deficits created downstate, at the expense of the lifestyle, recreational opportunities, and livelihoods of people in the U.P.

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- Gary McDowell, State Representative

"If the \$72 million were being used to build top-notch oversight capabilities for this mine, that would be another matter, but the rules Michigan is creating to govern sulfide mines are not as strong as other states," he said. "It's not that mining companies are full of criminals, it's that the job they're doing is difficult," he continued. Companies try to hold to the perimeters of their permits, but Michigan has a poor history of enforcing water quality standards in the first place, and that adds up to a grim picture, Mr. Gowland said.

"This is a very bad deal for Michigan," he concluded, "and even worse for the U.P."

State Representative Gary McDowell (D-Rudyard) is a member of the Northern Michigan Task force.

"We had a hearing based on sulfide mining in July where we heard both sides of the story," he said.

He noted that residents of the area are concerned, despite assurances by Kennecott and the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) that the safest technology would be used. As far as the state is concerned, Mr. McDowell said, the sulfide mine is all but approved, but he is concerned about the potential pollution of the Great Lakes and Michigan rivers.

"Eventually, Michigan will be an economic power," he said, "but our economic power will be based on water. Water is fast becoming the most important commodity in the world, and the small economic benefits this mine will produce are far outweighed by the risks. That's why we have to really monitor

this." Michigan, he said, has been stopping sources of pollution from old industrial sites and septic runoff for some time. "We've been trying to reverse 200 years of making the Great Lakes a dumping ground, and this appears to be a new source of pollution. If this mine doesn't work, we have to stop it."

Jon Cherry said that before discharging the water used in the Eagle mine, as it will be called, the water will be treated to "better-than-drinking-quality standards."

Jonathon Mead of UPCAP said this is an Upper Peninsula-wide issue and his agency's planners felt it was important enough to gather county commissioners from all over the region to form positions on the issue.

At UPCAP's meeting, commissioners heard presentations by Jon Cherry of Kennecott Minerals, Joe Maki of the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ), Doug Cornett of Northwoods Wilderness Recovery, and Michelle Halley, an attorney for the National Wildlife Federation.

"If the mine is built in the central U.P.," said Ms. Halley, "The U.P. may be viewed as a less desirable place to visit, impacting tourism in places as far apart as Whitefish Point and the Keewenaw Peninsula."

Mr. McDowell agreed.

"The most serious problem for residents of the Eastern Upper Peninsula right now is creating the perception that the Great Lakes are contaminated," he said.

"Another serious problem," said Ms. Halley, "is the transportation of potentially toxic sulfide-bearing rocks across the U.P."

According to Kennecott's Mr. Cherry, the rock unearthed on the Yellow Dog Plains near Marquette will be shipped to Canada, resulting in a steady stream of trucks out of Marquette for the next five to seven years. Ms. Halley said that these trucks could emit potentially toxic sulfide dust across the U.P.

Wisconsin dealt with the issue of sulfide mining in the 1980s and 1990s. Eventually, lawmakers passed Act 171 of 1997, which places strict restrictions on sulfide mining. Under it, for a prospective sulfide mining company to receive a permit in Wisconsin, it must first show that a sulfide mine has oper-

ated safely somewhere in North America for 10 years. The act also requires that the company show evidence that a sulfide mine has been closed for 10 years without polluting ground or surface water with sulfuric acid or heavy metal contamination. According to Ms. Halley, no company has been able to do so.

According to a publication by an environmental organization called Save the Wild U.P., when Wisconsin passed its new restrictions, Kennecott officials turned their attention to Michigan, which had no comprehensive regulations on sulfide mining. In response, the Michigan legislature passed Part 632 of Michigan's Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Act. Part 632, designed to control sulfide mining.

"It's a good statute," Ms. Halley said, "but the rule-making process that goes with the statute isn't going well."

According to Mr. Maki of the DEQ, the majority of its funding for regulating the Eagle mine would have to come from Kennecott by means of application and surveillance fees.

He feels that this method is better than relying on the general fund, which is subject legislative control. If his department had to rely on the general fund, he said, oversight money could be reduced or cut, making the DEQ's ability to oversee the project tenuous. Nevertheless, the National Wildlife Federation has pointed out problems with the DEQ's ability to control sulfide mining.

"The DEQ has no mechanism for denying a permit based on a mine site's location," Ms. Halley said. "They can't say a mine

shouldn't be built in a particular site due to its proximity to water, for example."

According to Mr. Cherry, Kennecott could apply for a permit as soon as the end of December 2005, or early in January 2006, but he added that no firm date has been set.

Members of an organization called Concerned Citizens of Big Bay have called on Michigan residents to write to Governor Jennifer Granholm concerning sulfide mining.

Ms. Halley said it is important for people concerned with the potential social and environmental impacts of the Eagle Project to go to public hearings on the matter.

Public hearings will take place in Marquette and in Lansing within the next couple of months, said Ms. Halley. At these hearings, the public can give testimony concerning what could be changed in the rules.

The DEQ must acknowledge such public input in writing by adjusting the rules or by explaining how issues have already been addressed, she said.

"The DEQ was shocked by the

high turnout at a public information meeting in Marquette last August," Ms. Halley said. "It is the public which can give the DEQ and governor's office the backbone to do the right thing."

There will be an informational meeting on the proposed rules Tuesday, November 29, from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m. and a public hearing between 7 p.m. and 9:30 p.m. in Marquette on the proposed rules.

On November 29, in Escanaba, there will be an informational meeting from 2 p.m. and 5 p.m. and a public hearing from 7 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on the proposed rules.

For more information on these meetings, contact Geological Survey (517) 241-1515.

Church To Host Bazaar Nov. 19

The St. James Lutheran Church in Rudyard will hold the "Come back to Grandma's kitchen" bazaar Saturday, November 19. The bazaar will be from 11 a.m. until 1 p.m. and will include a salad luncheon, baked goods, crafts, and a raffle.

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