



Great Lakes Advisory Board Public Meeting  
Freshwater Future Comments  
May 28, 2014

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Dear Advisory Board Members,

We are requesting that you recommend to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) a cumulative effects assessment of the impacts of mining on the Lake Superior watershed. Historic pollution from mining activities still plagues our Great Lakes region. For example, in Michigan's Houghton County Torch Lake remains on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's superfund list, as officials finish cleaning up more than 70 years' worth of dumped copper mining waste that once filled 20 percent of the lake with sediments poisonous to marine life. In Wisconsin, the Flambeau Mine was an open-pit copper-gold-silver mine located near Ladysmith that was permitted in January 1991 and began production in 1993. It operated for four years, ceasing in 1997. Surface water runoff from the mine site does not meet Wisconsin surface water quality standards. Runoff is polluting a stream which flows into the Flambeau River. Multiple water samples between 2004 and 2008 show significantly elevated levels of copper, exceeding both chronic and acute standards. Studies show that the stream is almost devoid of life, including vegetation, macroinvertebrates, and fish. Researchers believe this is because of the high metal levels.

Moving forward, there will only be a continued increase in world-wide demand for metals. Copper and other base-metals are wide spread in the upper Great Lakes. Mine development will impact surface water, groundwater, landscapes, aquatic and terrestrial biota, and human health. Some possible effects include destruction of wetlands and terrestrial habitat from mine development, draining of wetlands and lowering of groundwater levels from the dewatering, metal and acid contamination of streams, wetlands, stream sediment, aquatic invertebrates, fish, groundwater, drinking water, and surface runoff. Compounding these problems are cuts to regulatory agencies that are not adequately staffed to review new proposal or manage new mining.

As you likely know, the federal government has committed just under \$500 million dollars to restoring the health of the Great Lakes between the years 2010-2015. Much funding has been spent to restore areas degraded by mining activities. Such projects include:

- Mercury Testing and Updating Tribal Walleye Consumption Advice to Great Lakes Indian Fish and Wildlife Commission (\$458,524, 2010);
- Remediation of mining waste disposal through the Hills Creek Stamp Sand Stabilization project by Houghton Keweenaw Conservation District (\$415,000, 2010); and

- Evaluation of Methods to Control Mercury Emissions at Taconite Plants Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (\$1,571,985, 2010)

There are have also been approximately 47 additional project funded in the Lakes Superior region that relate to restoration of areas degraded by mining activities.

A cumulative effects assessment of the impacts of mining Lakes Superior watershed's water, habitats and human health will provide a much needed baseline that does not currently exist for future decision making and provide insurance on the GLRI investments being made in the Lake Superior watershed. It would be a tragedy if the hard work of people around the region working to secure federal investments for our Lakes and engaging in restoration activates didn't result in the net gains we intend due to compounding degradation from mining activates that are not being assessed. Right now there are new mines being proposed in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Michigan with more likely on the way.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Cheryl Kallio, Associate Director  
Freshwater Future