

Documents Confirm Extent of Possible Pollution from Northwoods Mine

Written by Clean Wisconsin

Thursday, 15 August 2013 10:06 - Last Updated Thursday, 15 August 2013 10:25

http://www.newiproggressive.com/images/stories/S5/strip_mining_s5.jpg



Boundaries of GTAC's proposed mine site include confirmed presence of toxic pollutants.

MADISON - With concerned citizens gathering in Hurley, Wis. today for the first of potentially only two required hearings regarding Gogebic Taconite's application to mine iron ore from the Penoque Range, the company's initial application materials are a huge cause for concern about the future of Wisconsin's Northwoods.

"The volume of waste rock they will generate is enough to bury the entire city of Green Bay under 10.5 feet of waste," says Tyson Cook, staff scientist at Clean Wisconsin, the state's largest environmental organization. "And to make matters worse, we now know the exact areas they will mine, areas where the presence of mercury, arsenic, asbestos-like minerals and acid-causing rock has been confirmed."

Gogebic Taconite (GTAC) recently submitted its pre-application to strip mine almost 7,000 acres in Ashland and Iron counties and its plan to sample the rock in the area, called "bulk sampling," to the state Department of Natural Resources. The pre-application raises many red flags, but Clean Wisconsin is particularly concerned about the following:

- The U.S. Geological Survey has identified sulfide-containing rock where GTAC is proposing to mine, which can cause acid mine drainage. However, GTAC is choosing to not sample this acid-generating rock, which includes parts of the iron formation itself, and has yet to specify its plans for dealing with and preventing acid drainage.
- GTAC has said it does not need to follow asbestos-related laws, citing an inconclusive study from the 1990s of Minnesota's Mesabi Iron Range, which has similar geology to the Penoque Range. However, a more recent multimillion-dollar study of iron mining by the state of Minnesota confirms rock in the Mesabi contains asbestos-like minerals, and miners there are developing mesothelioma, an aggressive and deadly form of lung cancer, at a rate nearly three times higher than expected.
- Recent geologic testing of the waste rock overlying the Penoque iron deposit confirmed the presence of mercury in the rock. This toxic material will be released into the air through extraction and processing activities at the proposed mine and can leach into the water. Iron

Documents Confirm Extent of Possible Pollution from Northwoods Mine

Written by Clean Wisconsin

Thursday, 15 August 2013 10:06 - Last Updated Thursday, 15 August 2013 10:25

mines in Minnesota are already the largest single source of mercury in Lake Superior, and a 2012 study showed that one of every 10 babies born in the Lake Superior region of Minnesota have unsafe levels of mercury in the bodies.

While GTAC's pre-application outlines the area it seeks to mine, the 62-page document is otherwise scarce on details regarding its operations and how the company will protect the area's air, water and public health. For instance, the pre-application says nothing of how GTAC is going to control problems like acid mine drainage, how it will deal with the massive amounts of waste rock it will generate, even where it will get the water it needs to operate the mine.

"GTAC has provided bare minimum information about many of the most critical aspects of its plan that could have grave impacts on our natural resources and the health of Wisconsinites in the region," says Elizabeth Wheeler, staff attorney at Clean Wisconsin. "In reviewing the pre-application, we're left with many questions and even more concerns about the future of Northern Wisconsin's landscape."

Additional information on the GTAC mine: www.cleanwisconsin.org/enviropedia/gtac-mine
Additional information on acid mine drainage at the GTAC mine: <http://bit.ly/16NoVZj>

###

Clean Wisconsin, an environmental advocacy organization, protects Wisconsin's clean water and air and advocates for clean energy by being an effective voice in the state legislature and by holding elected officials and polluters accountable. On behalf of its 10,000 members, supporters and its coalition partners, Clean Wisconsin protects the special places that make Wisconsin such a wonderful place to live, work and play. 608-251-7020, www.cleanwisconsin.org