

# Protect our Waters from the proposed PolyMet Sulfide Mine!



The foreign PolyMet Mining Corporation has proposed to dig the first ever copper-sulfide mine in Minnesota on Superior National Forest lands, threatening local water supplies, the Lake Superior watershed, and downstream residents. Communities at risk include some of the largest populations in Northeast Minnesota – Duluth, Cloquet, and the Fond du Lac Reservation.

At today's hearing, the MN Department of Natural Resources and Minnesota Pollution Control Agency are accepting public input on PolyMet's critical Permit to Mine and permits allowing water pollution and wetlands destruction. **We must urge the DNR to deny the Permit to Mine for PolyMet and urge the MPCA to deny all PolyMet pollution permits and certifications. Here are suggestions for important talking points:**

## 500+ YEARS OF TOXIC POLLUTION

- Sulfide mining is highly dangerous and has been called "America's most toxic industry" by the EPA, carrying much greater risks than iron ore mining, with a 100% track record of pollution. Toxic seepage from PolyMet's copper-nickel sulfide mine pits, tailings, and other wastes containing sulfate and toxic heavy metals would last for centuries, if not forever. PolyMet's own environmental impact statement concedes that water treatment at the plant site would be required for 500 years.
- Pollution would contaminate Hoyt Lakes' drinking water, the Embarrass, Partridge & St. Louis Rivers, kill downstream wild rice, and increase mercury contamination of fish.

## THREAT TO DOWNSTREAM COMMUNITIES

- The DNR's draft permit would allow PolyMet to use the same wet slurry tailings storage method that resulted in a catastrophic collapse and devastating pollution at the Mount Polley mine in British Columbia, Canada, even though better and safer technologies are available. A tailings dam failure would threaten downstream populations, including Duluth, Cloquet & the Fond du Lac Reservation.
- The recent tailings basin disasters of Canada's Mount Polley dam in 2014 and Brazil's Fundao dam in 2015, whose toxic waste flowed over 400 miles downstream, demonstrate that large-scale mine dam failures are not only possible, but likely.

## EXTREME EXTRACTION & WASTE

- The grade of the ore is less than 1%, resulting in 99% waste rock and tailings. A sulfide-mining district across Northeastern Minnesota would ultimately destroy and degrade the headwaters of Lake Superior, as well as the Boundary Waters and Mississippi River watersheds.
- The DNR draft permit would allow PolyMet to appropriate 6.175 billion gallons per year of water and drain the headwaters of the Partridge River. DNR draft permits don't protect surface water, groundwater or the Lake Superior Basin.

## **CORPORATE GAIN – PUBLIC LOSS**

- The DNR has estimated that mine closure and centuries of water treatment would cost more than \$1 billion. But the DNR proposes that PolyMet would get a permit to mine by guaranteeing less than 10% of that amount up front, with almost no insurance for spills or dam collapse.
- Even though mining companies are supposed to provide financial assurance for clean up, the record from other states shows that cleanup costs exceed projections, with taxpayers footing the bill. In addition, financial assurance does not prevent the destruction of forests, wetlands, water quality, wildlife habitat, scenic areas, and biodiversity. Financial assurance does not cover catastrophic mine disasters such as those that occurred at Mount Polley in Canada and the Fundao dam collapse in Brazil which killed 19 people.

## **THREAT TO HEALTH, FISH, AND WILDLIFE**

- Sulfates directly contribute to the methylation of mercury, with resulting fish consumption advisories. The old LTV taconite property purchased by PolyMet is already leaching sulfates and other metals into the watershed.
- In addition to an acute potential for Acid Mine Drainage (AMD) and the discharge of heavy metals to the St. Louis River watershed, the PolyMet mine would discharge sulfates at a level that could decimate wild rice stands downstream. Wild rice holds critical importance for Minnesota's Native American tribes, and the St. Louis River watershed flows through tribal lands.

## **REVERSE OSMOSIS WON'T SAVE US**

- PolyMet is pushing the false narrative that reverse osmosis technology can solve pollution problems. PolyMet cites no example where reverse osmosis has been used at a similar scale to control mining pollution.
- A 2012 news release by PolyMet noted that in their pilot reverse osmosis test, they did not use actual sulfide mining wastewater.
- Perhaps most important, pollution that seeps into groundwater from mine pits, tailings, and wastes would never be treated. MPCA permits don't control any pollution that seeps from groundwater into wetlands and streams.

## **BOOM-AND-BUST EXTRACTION ECONOMY**

- Permitting of the PolyMet mine would open the door to a flood of sulfide mine applications, setting the stage for an extreme extraction economy in Northern Minnesota.
- In the words of former Iron Range mine electrician Bob Tammen, "The coal mining industry is destroying West Virginia from the top down as it goes after dirty coal by mountain topping. The copper mining industry will destroy Minnesota from the bottom up as it degrades our ground water and surface water by mining in our lakes, rivers, and wetlands.... According to the U.S. Department of Commerce, mining is less than 1 percent of Minnesota's economy. Instead of destroying our wetlands, we should diversify our Range economy."