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## **“No Action” only acceptable alternative on PolyMet Draft Environmental Impact Statement**

**As currently proposed, mine would put state’s taxpayers and  
clean waters at significant risk from incomplete, inaccurate work**

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MINNEAPOLIS, MN – The Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness today submitted its comments to the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the Army Corps of Engineers on the PolyMet NorthMet mining project Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

As the result of numerous serious flaws in the environmental review process and the project proposal, the Friends recommends the “No Action” alternative until significant problems have been addressed.

“PolyMet says they want to do this the environmentally-responsible way,” said Paul Danicic, executive director of the Friends. “But the Draft EIS is full of unsupported assumptions, omissions of data, and over-reliance on modeling. The fact is that this mine as proposed will inevitably, unavoidably, pollute the waters of northeastern Minnesota.”

To help analyze the document, the Friends retained four noted scientists with decades of combined experience in fields such as mine engineering, geohydrology, wetlands, aquatic ecology, and other relevant areas. More information about the experts, their credentials and their reports are available with the Friends’ comments at <http://www.friends-bwca.org/news/2010/02/polymet-draft-eis-comments/>.

Significant flaws in the DEIS include, but are not limited to:

- Lack of financial assurance – Delaying such an important component until the permitting stage is a serious omission, making it impossible to fully assess the project’s potential environmental impacts, and putting Minnesota’s taxpayers and natural resources at risk.  
(Page 3)

- Inadequate data collection and disclosure – The DEIS is overly dependent on modeling when real-world data could have been easily obtained and would have provided far more useful and predictive information. (Page 9)
- Long-term water contamination from waste rock – The DEIS predicts that water leaching from waste rock piles will exceed Minnesota's water quality standards for multiple metals and compounds for up to 2,000 years. (Page 16)
- Contaminated overflow from mine pit – Approximately 45 years after mine closure, the DEIS predicts that the mine's West Pit will overflow and spill into the Partridge River. Water from the pit is expected to exceed water quality standards including likely mercury contamination, and pollution of the river will violate the Clean Water Act. (Page 16-17)
- Inaccurate wetland characterization – By mischaracterizing many wetlands as isolated from groundwater, rather than accurately as “fens” which have higher connectivity with groundwater, the DEIS fails to acknowledge the potential for these wetlands to spread contamination from the tailings basin and waste rock piles and to increase the production of methylmercury. (Pages 18-19)
- Overreliance on wetlands for water treatment – Despite acknowledging the wildly variable success of using wetlands for water treatment, the DEIS proposes to use wetlands as a primary tool for water treatment and relies heavily on the assumption that it will work. (Page 21)
- Unsafe tailings basins – The DEIS acknowledges that the tailings basins will have a “low margin of safety” because the underlying material—fine tailings from the LTV taconite mine—is unstable and poorly-constructed. Failure of the tailings basin would result in the release of a catastrophic amount of toxic mine waste. (Pages 25-26)
- Sulfate contamination and mercury methylation – High levels of sulfates discharged into surface and groundwater will increase the methylation of mercury, a biological process which can result in the bioaccumulation of mercury in fish and is toxic to wildlife and humans. Increased sulfate levels will also have negative impacts on wild rice beds in lakes and rivers downstream from the mine, seriously harming an important cultural resource of Ojibwa Band members in the region. (Pages 30-35)

“The flaws in this document are very real and very serious,” said Betsy Daub, policy director of the Friends. “Left unaddressed, these problems would mean enormous financial, environmental and health risks for the people of our state.”

In addition to describing the document's flaws and the threats it poses to the region's lakes, rivers, streams and groundwater, the Friends also provided substantive recommendations wherever possible, offering proactive solutions and measurable ways to improve the environmental review and the project. Recommendations include:

- Inclusion of financial assurance calculations in the EIS, accounting for costs of long-term water treatment. In his report, Dr. Chambers provided a rough calculation of \$100 million for mine clean-up, closure and long-term water treatment.
- Basing the reclamation plan on a plan provided from another mine that includes details adequate to ensure full clean-up before the company is released from its permit conditions.
- Analysis of a centerline design for the tailings basin to increase stability.
- Additional data collection techniques to better understand groundwater flows, wetland types and behaviors, and other important information to inform predictions.

More than 750 individuals had submitted comments to the Minnesota DNR on the DEIS by Wednesday morning via the Friends' sulfide mining website at [www.preciouswaters.org](http://www.preciouswaters.org). Commenters frequently echoed the above concerns, as well as expressing great concern over the possibility that this type of mining can even be done in the watery ecosystems of northeastern Minnesota without serious, long-term pollution.

“It is of critical importance that the environmental review process for PolyMet be done right,” said Danicic. “This is the first of several such mines that could open up in Minnesota, and precedents for what levels of risk are acceptable, and unacceptable, will be set during this process. PolyMet has a lot of work to do to convince the Minnesota public that they can mine this ore and protect our natural resources at the same time.”

Comments and related links:

- [Full comments](#) (PDF)
- [Web page including links to expert reports and supporting documents](#)
- [PolyMet DEIS](#) (Minnesota DNR Web site)

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*The Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness works to protect the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness through advocacy and education. Founded in 1976 to help pass the legislation that permanently designated the Boundary Waters as federal Wilderness, the organization’s mission is to protect, preserve and restore the wilderness character of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness and the Quetico-Superior ecosystem. Online at [www.friends-bwca.org](http://www.friends-bwca.org).*