1. **How would Prove It First work?**

Prove It First would require a company seeking to operate a nonferrous (e.g., copper-sulfide) mine to first demonstrate that a nonferrous mine has operated elsewhere in the United States for at least ten years and has been closed for at least year without polluting. Prove It First puts the focus on the inevitably of pollution from this type of mine. Nonferrous mining has a perfect record of pollution in the United States. Prove It First is modeled on a Wisconsin law that was in effect for nearly twenty years (1998–2017), until the sulfide mining industry led to the law's repeal.

2. **Would Prove It First apply to the taconite (iron) mining currently operating in Minnesota?**

No. Prove It First would only apply only to nonferrous mining (e.g., copper-sulfide mining), which has never been done in Minnesota. Prove It First would not apply to ferrous mining (taconite or iron mining).

3. **Aren't taconite (iron) mining and nonferrous (e.g., copper-sulfide mining) the same thing?**

No. Not at all. Nonferrous is fundamentally different from taconite mining in two respects. First, the ore sought in nonferrous mining is typically copper or nickel, whereas the ore sought by ferrous mining is taconite (iron). Moreover, the type of pollution from nonferrous mining is fundamentally different — and much more toxic to the environment. This is because sulfide is bound up in the rock formation with the copper or nickel. When the sulfide is exposed to air and water, sulfuric acid is produced. This does happen with taconite (iron) mining.
4. I have heard that Minnesota has some of the best environmental laws in the world. Why not have the mines operate here?

The idea that Minnesota has some of the best or most strict environmental laws is false. Our current laws in no way make Minnesota immune to pollution. In fact, many incidents, past and recent, prove Minnesota has faced many environmental disasters that state law failed to prevent. If Minnesota’s laws were adequate to protect clean water, 56% of our water would not be listed as “impaired.”

Minnesota’s laws have allowed for some truly egregious environmental disasters.

In 1991, Minnesota was home to the largest inland oil spill in U.S. history. Reserve Mining was allowed to pump waste into Lake Superior for decades until a judge, not our state agencies, stopped this. More recently, state agencies approved the Line 3 pipeline, despite warnings of pollution from scientists. Line 3 polluted surrounding water sources within a year of construction. 3M was releasing dangerous PFAS into East Metro water sources for years. For over 17 years, Water Gremlin was releasing the hazardous chemical TCE into the air. In April 2023, we learned that 400,000 gallons of radioactive water leaked from a pipe at a nuclear facility in Monticello. Taconite mines, which are inherently less polluting than sulfide mines, are still failing to meet Minnesota’s standards on mercury release.

These are just a few examples of pollution that Minnesota’s environmental regulations and regulators failed to prevent. Every one of these industries is inherently less polluting than sulfide mining, an industry that has polluted every time and is considered the most polluting industry in America by chemical releases by the EPA.

Regarding sulfide mining specifically, Minnesota does not even have the most protective regulations in the United States. Montana, for one, has far higher standards for copper–sulfide mining due to a long history of pollution by the industry there. Minnesota’s mining regulations were
written to regulate taconite mining, not sulfide mining which is far more polluting, and they still fail to prevent pollution from taconite.

Across the world, regulations are stricter as well, evidenced by Peru, Brazil, Chile, and Canada all putting restrictions or outright bans on the use of upstream tailings dams. Upstream tailings dams are known to be inherently less stable than other dam types and have led to terrible disasters around the world. Despite this, Minnesota DNR approved an upstream tailings dam to be located upstream of Lake Superior and has so far refused to reconsider this approval. It is worth noting that Minnesota DNR has a direct conflict of interest regarding regulation mining as the agency has statutory obligations to both promote mining and protect natural resources.

Industry executives would have us believe the environmental review process in Minnesota is as simple as independent scientists making decisions free from political influence. That depending on what the science says, the mines will be rejected or approved. This is false. The review process is not designed to stop polluting projects.

Pro-sulfide mining advocates know this is true. Former State Senator Tom Bakk, one of copper-sulfide mining’s biggest proponents, told mining advocates that environmental review would not stop these mines, despite the mountains of evidence that this type of mining cannot be done safely.

5. Are Minnesota’s metal reserves needed for the transition to a green energy economy?

No. Despite industry efforts to greenwash these copper-sulfide mining proposals, the world is not waiting on Northern Minnesota’s metal to stop climate change. Copper, the primary mineral that would be extracted by the proposed mines, is not even a critical mineral. Copper is one of the world’s most reusable resources, and if built, Twin Metals and PolyMet would produce just a tiny fraction (.5%) of the world’s annual copper


Supply. Opening these mines would have little to no effect on the global copper supply.

Nickel is more in demand; however, nickel would make up only a small amount of the total ore mined by these projects. There is no guarantee that the small amount of nickel produced would even be used for renewable technology. We live in a capitalist system, and the mining companies will sell the metal to the highest bidder, whoever that may be. Though nickel is currently an essential component of the batteries in electric cars, very little of the global nickel supply goes to batteries: about 5%. Meaning 95% of nickel from these mines would not go to the green economy.

Efforts are already underway to create batteries that do not require copper, nickel or cobalt. By the time these mines were to open, we may not need these minerals at all. Major automotive producers like GM, Volvo, and Tesla have all announced major plans for electric vehicles in the near future. They have announced and committed to these plans despite PolyMet permits being suspended and Twin Metals being rejected. The green revolution is NOT dependent on these specific mines.

6. Where can we get these metals if not Minnesota?

Efforts for obtaining metals needed for renewable technology should be recycling, not new mining. Heavy metals recycling is on the rise and needs to be heavily invested in for its potential to help us avoid the need for dangerous mining projects. Currently, the US recycles just 33% of its copper, compared to 60% for the European Union. Increasing the U.S. copper recycling rate to just 50% would create more copper than 13 PolyMet mines. There is an estimated 30 years of copper available to be recycled, a process 13 times cheaper than extracting from the ground. It takes 80 to 90 percent less energy to recycle copper than to mine for it.

The opportunities to expand metals recycling are immense. In 2018, the U.S. sent over a billion pounds of non-ferrous metal to landfills from
municipal trash alone. According to a recent study from the Iron Range Partnership for Sustainability, capturing and recycling 100% of MN's e-waste would create metals for 155,000 electric vehicles and 441,000 solar panels and generate 3,345 new jobs and $2.8B in economic activity annually.

Recycling is also much less carbon-intensive than mining. Copper recycling emits 65% less greenhouse gas pollution than mining, and nickel recycling produces 90% fewer emissions. Metals recycling, not polluting copper-sulfide mining, is the way to support a just, clean energy transition in Minnesota.

However, depending on how quickly new technology develops, some new mining may be needed but, if that is the case, there are plenty of places in the United States or allied nations that can produce these metals. Copper mines are operating in the arid environment of the American Southwest and will continue to do so. Additionally, projects are ongoing in allied nations like Canada and Australia to mine heavy metals, with more on the horizon.

Non-Comprehensive List of Copper-Sulfide / Nickel-Sulfide Mines Operating in North America or Allied Countries:

- Robinson Mine - Nevada
- Kennecott Copper Project - Utah
- Bingham Canyon - Utah
- Morenci Mine - Arizona
- El Chino - Arizona
- Bagdad Mine - Arizona
- Pinto Valley - Arizona
- Sierrita Mine - Arizona
- Safford Mine - Arizona
- Voisey's Bay - Canada
- Highland Valley Copper Mine - Canada
- Gibraltar Mine - Canada
- Mount Milligan Mine - Canada
7. **Would opening copper-sulfide mines in Minnesota stop child labor abroad?**

No. While the conditions at copper-sulfide mines in the Democratic Republic of Congo are abhorrent and have been found to include child labor, the idea that approving polluting mines in Minnesota will end child labor abroad is wrong. Companies using child labor abroad will continue to do so regardless of how many mines they get greenlit in America.

In fact, the company using child labor in the D.R.C. is Glencore, the owner of PolyMet. Lobbying on behalf of PolyMet is actively supporting the exact company using the child labor that pro-sulfide mining advocates claim to want to stop. Opening polluting mines in Minnesota will in no way affect how these massive conglomerates operate in other countries and will, in fact, directly reward the same companies using child labor abroad.

A better way to incentivize international mining conglomerates to stop using child labor abroad would be to pass the **Bad Actor Bill**, which bans mining companies using child labor from operating in Minnesota. If Minnesota’s minerals really are as critical as the industry would have us believe, this would actually give the companies a reason to change.

**For More information contact:**

Scott Beauchamp,
Policy Director, Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness

[scott@friends-bwca.org](mailto:scott@friends-bwca.org) | 612.860.4698