



US Army Corps  
of Engineers  
St. Paul District

# Information Paper

## Regulatory Program: ArcelorMittal Minorca Mine, Inc. – East Pit #1 Pushback Project, Biwabik, Minnesota

### Contact

Daryl W. Wierzbinski  
(218) 834-6630  
[daryl.w.wierzbinski@usace.army.mil](mailto:daryl.w.wierzbinski@usace.army.mil)

### Description

ArcelorMittal Minorca Mine, Inc. (Minorca), has proposed extending its East Pit #1 open pit iron-ore mining area to the south by 52 acres (the Pushback project) near Biwabik, in St. Louis County, Minnesota. The Pushback project would directly impact approximately 21.4 acres of wetlands previously permitted by the Corps as indirect wetland impacts in Department of the Army (DA) permit 2005-110-JKA, dated March 5, 2007. That permit requires modification to accommodate the applicant's proposed 21.4-acre direct wetland impact.

### Background

Minorca's economically mineable iron-ore reserves were expected to be exhausted by 2011 from their Laurentian Mine that has been in operation since 1990. In 2005, the company proposed the East Reserve Project in an area of 950 acres between McKinley and Biwabik to develop two new mine pits (East Pits #1 and #2) and stockpile areas (#1 and #2) with a new haul road. The purpose of the project was to extend the production life of the mine and operating facilities to 2024. Approximately 119,000,000 long tons of ore would be mined over an estimated 18-year life of the mine. The project underwent a joint State and Federal environmental impact statement (EIS) review. The review indicated that the East Pits (#1 and #2) were the only areas having mineable iron ore that was economically feasible to mine and process at that time. An important element of the EIS and permit review included maintaining a corridor between the mine pits and stockpile areas to assist wildlife movement across the range and to maintain hydrology across the mine site to wetlands to the south of the mine. The project received Corps authorization in 2007 for direct and indirect impacts to 103.6 acres of wetlands. The company has begun work for the East Reserve project in East Pit #1 and the Stockpile #1 (see drawing).

The proposed Pushback project would extend the East Reserve's East Pit #1 south to mine the iron ore reserves that are now viewed as economically feasible because of

the current market value of steel prices. Approximately 14,300,000 long tons of ore would be mined over an estimated 1.5-year life of the mine. The proposed Pushback project would not include new processing facilities, infrastructure, or specialized equipment.



### Status

Minorca originally submitted information on the proposed East Pit #1 Pushback Project on February 20, 2012. The Corps reviewed the administrative record and the EIS for DA permit 2005-110-JKA and determined that the Pushback project would require a new application and an environmental assessment. The proposal would impact wetlands outside the scope of the 2005 review area and would impact the area inside the corridor that was to be maintained. The Corps discussed the level of review with the company on May 25 and June 1, 2012. The company voluntarily submitted a reduced scope proposed East Pit #1 Pushback project dated July 9, 2012, to avoid additional wetland impacts and the corridor.

Based on its preliminary review, the Corps has determined that the amended proposal could be reviewed as a permit modification to DA permit 2005-110-JKA.

### Authority

Section 404 of the Clean Water Act of 1977.