



US Army Corps
of Engineers
St. Paul District

Information Paper

Regulatory Program: PolyMet Mining, Inc., NorthMet Mine and Ore Processing Facilities, Hoyt Lakes, Minnesota

Contact

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Location/Description

PolyMet Mining, Inc. (PolyMet), has proposed to construct and operate an open pit mine approximately 6 miles south of Babbitt in St. Louis County, Minnesota (see Figure 1). The ore would be hauled approximately 8 miles west on an existing railroad line for processing in an idle taconite ore processing plant approximately 6 miles north of Hoyt Lakes, Minnesota. The ore would be crushed and processed to extract copper, nickel, cobalt, and precious metals by flotation, dissolution, and precipitation. Tailings would be discharged into an existing taconite tailings basin.

Background

PolyMet has delineated a sulfide mineral ore body of approximately 228 million tons. The open pit mine, waste rock stockpiles, and other mine-site facilities would disturb approximately 1,454 acres. The least reactive waste rock would be stored in a permanent stockpile adjacent to the mine. The most reactive waste rock would be stored temporarily in lined surface stockpiles and then backfilled into the mine pit and permanently stored under water. Ore processing would take place at the existing Cliffs Erie taconite ore processing plant. The plant would need to be refurbished and modified to process base and precious metal sulfide ore. PolyMet has estimated that the project would have direct impacts on approximately 854.2 acres of wetlands. In addition, approximately 667.9 acres of indirect wetland impacts are estimated. Most of the wetlands at the mine site abut the Partridge River, which is part of a tributary system to Lake Superior. The potential for elevated levels of sulfate and metals in drainage water from the open pits, stockpiles and tailings basin is a major concern.

The Corps, Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, and U.S. Forest Service (USFS) are co-lead agencies for preparation of a joint Federal-State

environmental impact statement (EIS). The Bois Forte, Fond du Lac, and Grand Portage Bands, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), are cooperating agencies. Impacts to Canada lynx habitat will be coordinated with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service through Section 7 Consultation. Historic property effects determinations are being coordinated with the State Historic Preservation Office under Section 106 Consultation. A land exchange between the USFS and PolyMet is proposed. A draft EIS was released to the public in November 2009. The EPA provided comments and a rating of Environmentally Unsatisfactory-Inadequate (EU-3). Several thousand comment letters were received from the public and environmental organizations. As a result, the co-lead agencies decided to prepare a supplemental draft EIS (SDEIS) that will evaluate the environmental impacts of a revised project alternative to include the proposed land exchange. A Notice of Intent to prepare an SDEIS was published in the Federal Register on October 13, 2010. Over 300 public comments were received during the public scoping comment period. The lead agencies have developed a draft alternative to be evaluated in the preparation of the SDEIS based on draft EIS comments and PolyMet-proposed project revisions.

Status

Work continues on modeling air, surface water, and groundwater impacts for the draft alternative. SDEIS chapter writing is well underway. Issues affecting the project schedule include the development and review of the Adaptive Water Management Plan (AWMP) that will incorporate various fixed and adaptive engineering controls in modeling and final project design to ensure water quality and emissions standards are met during operation and in closure. Assuming favorable modeling results, the agencies will proceed with development and publication of an SDEIS tentatively scheduled for release in June 2013.

Authority

The Corps has regulatory authority over the proposed project based on Section 404(b) of the Clean Water Act of 1977.

Figure 1: PolyMet Mining, Inc., NorthMet Mine and Ore Processing Location

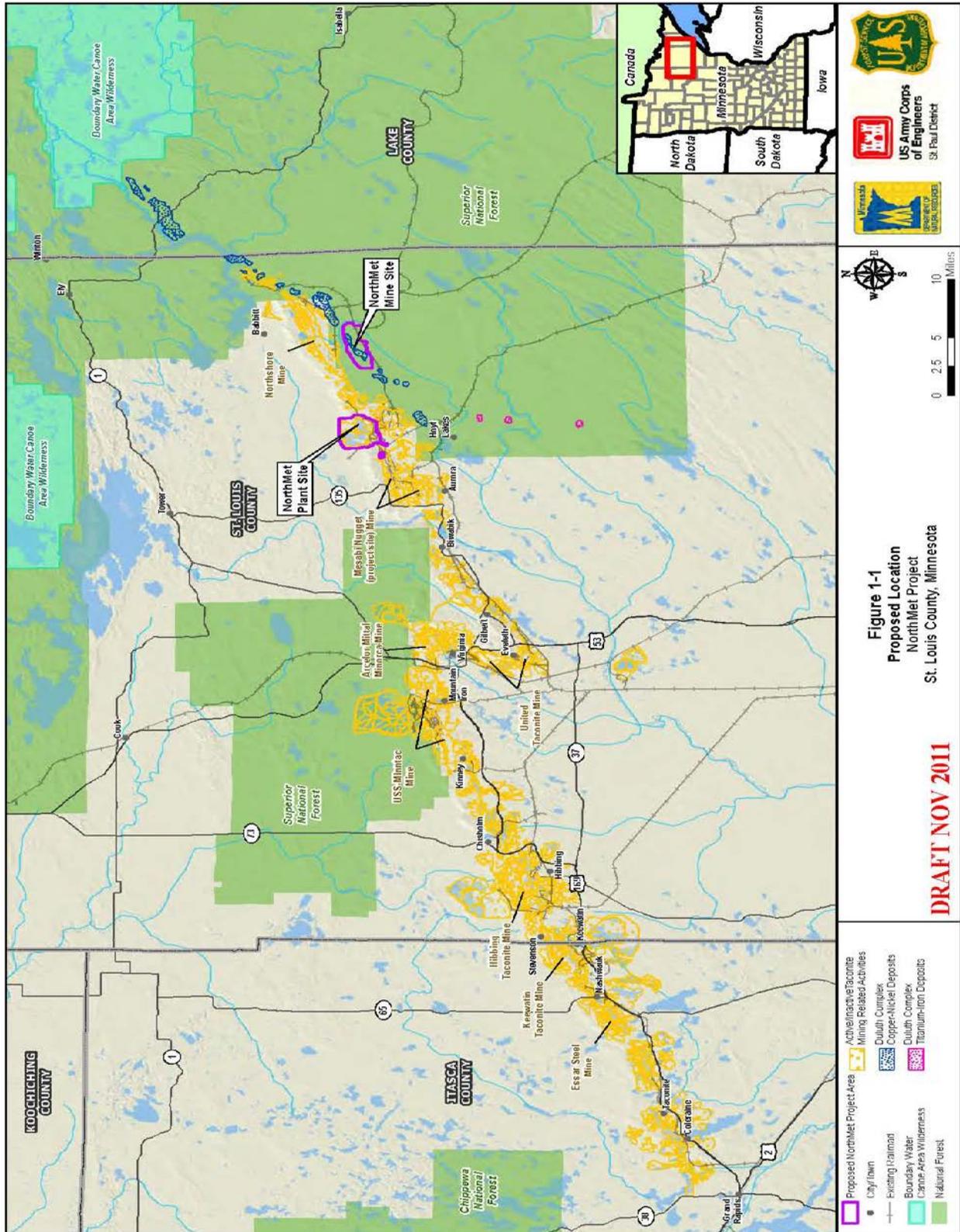


Figure 1-1
Proposed Location
NorthMet Project
St. Louis County, Minnesota

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