



US Army Corps
of Engineers
St. Paul District

Information Paper

Regulatory Program: U.S. Steel-Minnesota Ore Operations, Minntac Extension, Mountain Iron, Minnesota

Contact

Jill Bathke, Project Manager
(651) 290-5357
jill.c.bathke@usace.army.mil

Description

U.S. Steel (USS)-Minnesota Ore has proposed expanding its open pit taconite mine outside the current permit to mine boundary and relocating an access road at its existing facility near Mountain Iron, St. Louis County, Minnesota. The project would impact over 67 acres of wetlands and approximately 4,000 linear feet of a perennial stream and require an individual Section 404 Clean Water Act permit.

Background

The open pit mine and taconite pellet production facility has been in continuous operation since 1967. The proposed extension would increase the mining impact area 300 acres beyond the current permit to mine. Activities on the extension site would include stripping, mining, and the disposal of waste rock.

The proposed action would not include new ore processing facilities, infrastructure, or specialized equipment beyond that needed for existing operations. The project would continue to operate 24 hours per day, 365 days per year. Taconite pellet production output would stay relatively close to current production rates; the purpose of the extension project is to continue mine operations without significant reductions in iron ore production and quality. The footprint of the existing tailings basin would not change, but the height of the tailings would increase.

The relocation of St. Louis County Road 102 is a connected action to the pit extension and is being reviewed under a separate application, 2012-00690-JCB. Impacts to waters of the U.S. for the road relocation include approximately 1.3 acres of wetlands and 20 linear feet of a perennial stream.

Status

A complete application was received on June 6, 2012. A public notice was completed and the public comment

period closed on August 3, 2012. USS has been notified that its project would be evaluated through a standard individual permit process and that, at a minimum, an environmental assessment (EA) would be required.

USS' consultant is currently preparing and consolidating materials to support the Corps' EA. Once the Corps has completed the final EA and determined its adequacy and the need for a Federal environmental impact statement, we would continue to the permit evaluation and decision.

The applicant has proposed to mitigate for the proposed impacts from the proposed Palisades III wetland bank site in Aitkin County, Minnesota. The approval of Palisades III is ongoing. Discussion about appropriate stream mitigation options has begun with a focus on completing an in-kind stream restoration project within the watersheds of the Minntac Mine.

A survey to identify historic mining properties and archaeological resources has been completed and an effects determination will be coordinated with the State Historic Preservation Office in fall 2012. Identification of historic properties of religious and cultural significance has begun with the initiation of tribal consultation.

The Canada lynx is the only endangered species within the action area. The effects to the lynx under the proposed project will be considered in a forthcoming biological assessment, which will be sent to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Related Projects

The Corps is also evaluating a USS permit application to discharge dredged or fill material into 75 acres of wetland in conjunction with the proposal to expand mining within the current permit to mine boundary. This project is addressed in a separate information paper titled: *Regulatory Program: U.S. Steel-Minnesota Ore Operations, Minntac West Pit Expansion, Mountain Iron, Minnesota.*

Authority

Section 404 of the Clean Water Act of 1977