



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

Douglas W. Bruner
(651) 290-5378
douglas.w.bruner@usace.army.mil

Location/Description

PolyMet Mining, Inc., 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. The proposal would result in the loss of approximately 1,000 acres of wetlands. Most of the wetlands at the mine site abut the Partridge and Embarrass rivers, which are tributary systems 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 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources and the U.S. Forest Service 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 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 Forest Service 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. Several thousand comment letters were received from the public and environmental organizations. As a result, the co-lead agencies prepared a supplemental draft EIS that evaluates the environmental impacts of the revised project alternative to include the proposed land exchange. A Notice of Availability of the supplemental draft EIS was published in the *Federal Register* on December 13, 2013, and the public comment period ends on March 13, 2014. A Department of the Army permit application was received from the applicant in August 2013, and the Public Notice was issued December 13, 2013.

Status

Three joint federal/state public meetings for the purpose of considering public comments on the SDEIS will be held by the USACE, USFS, and the MDNR. The public hearing, under the authority of Section 404 of the Clean Water Act, will be held concurrently with the public meeting for the SDEIS in Duluth on January 16, 2014. The second public meeting will be held in Aurora Minnesota on January 22, 2014 and the third public meeting will be held in St. Paul Minnesota on January 28, 2014.

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

