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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### Community Concern for a Shared Resource: Mining and the Bad River Watershed

Gogebic Taconite's potential mine development in the Penokees will bring greater change to the Bad River watershed and the region than anyone has seen in the past 100 years. Quite simply, you can't dig a hole nearly 1,000 feet deep, and pile the waste rock elsewhere without making big changes. There will be impacts to streams, fish, groundwater, forests and wildlife - the questions we are asking are "What will those changes look like? How will they affect us, the rivers we enjoy, the water we drink...?"

How we as a community engage in the potential development of a mine will guide what those changes might look like over the next 25, 50, even 100 years. The prospect of a mine here should not proceed hastily. Local people and concerns need to have a voice in the process.

The Bad River Watershed Association (BRWA) is a group of local people who care for local rivers and the surrounding lands. We are an organization committed to sustaining the resources and opportunities that the Bad River Watershed provides. Our members—farmers, loggers, fisherman, canoeists, hikers and more - volunteer their energy, time and ideas to keep the land and water in the great shape that we all value.

At a town hall meeting in January held at the Northern Great Lakes Visitors Center, representatives from Gogebic Taconite were asked if they would seek legislative change to Wisconsin's permit or public input process. They said they would not. Last week, Gogebic Taconite/The Cline Group published an ad titled An Open Letter to the People of Ashland and Iron Counties informing us that they are now "seeking legislative action in Wisconsin." What has changed?

The ad states that the "regulatory framework needs certainty." We agree. For example, local people who drink groundwater from their wells need the certainty that they can continue to count on a reliable supply of safe drinking water. We deserve a permitting process that will ensure rigorous review before a mine goes forward. This is essential for any development that strives to be environmentally responsible.

Last week's letter also indicated that Gogebic Taconite would like to shorten the time period required to obtain a mining permit in Wisconsin. Responsible development requires adequate time for critical consideration of mining operations. Adequate review by professionals to evaluate environmental impacts should not be rushed. The permit process should not allow for a series of hurry-up exemptions to the detriment of our streams, wetlands and groundwater.

As a group committed to keeping a healthy connection between the watershed and its residents, BRWA is concerned about legislative changes that would make it harder for local residents to have a voice for what happens in their watershed. Local residents must have the

opportunity to learn about, comment on, and ultimately make decisions about actions that would have a lasting impact on the region, long after the mining company has left the area. With all that is at stake in this issue, the best way to move forward is with the involvement of an informed community. If legislators and the Cline Group speed the issue along, we won't have adequate time to fully consider the consequences of proposed actions. After all, it is our children and grandchildren who will live in the area after the mine is completed.

We recognize the need for economic development, and that these raw materials need to come from somewhere. Our focus is the same here as with any other issue: to make sure that watershed residents and policy-makers are well-informed and actively engaged. We will demand that any project proposals provide accurate accounting of their long-term economic, ecological, and social costs and benefits.

There's an old woodworking adage that most everyone has heard. "Measure twice, cut once." It's a simple idea, but good solid advice. There are over 125 miles of trout streams that drain from the Penokee Hills, like Devil's Creek - a Class I trout stream. Many rivers in the Penokees are supported by wetlands, which help to maintain approximately 100 miles of streams classified as Exceptional and Outstanding Resources Waters - a designation given to Wisconsin's highest quality waters. It would be a shame to make the mistake of rushing into a mine without a thorough evaluation of potential long-term impacts to our region. This is our home, our past and our future. Let's think carefully about what we do with what we have.

Signed,

The Board of Directors of the Bad River Watershed Association

Bill Heart  
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*The BRWA mission is to promote a healthy relationship between the people and natural communities of the Bad River watershed by involving all citizens in assessing, maintaining and improving watershed integrity for future generations. For the past 8 years, we have been working with our neighbors to ensure that change and development within the watershed grow from a stewardship ethic that seeks to minimize ecological damage, while maximizing ecological and community health. For more information about BRWA, visit our website at [www.badriverwatershed.org](http://www.badriverwatershed.org), or call Executive Director Michele Wheeler at 715-682-2003.*