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**Bad River Watershed Association Testimony at Public Hearing on Mining Bill LRB 3520/1
Assembly Committee on Jobs, Economy, and Small Business, December 14, 2011**

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My name is Bob Rice. I am president of the Board of the Bad River Watershed Association, speaking against LRB 3520. BRWA is neither pro mining nor anti mining. We are an organization committed to gathering sound scientific data to help community members make good decisions for the long term health of our home waters. We are also an organization that understands that there may be a need to refine mining legislation to make the permitting process more streamlined and efficient.

We also are committed to the following statement: **Companies seeking to establish mining operations in Wisconsin should meet requirements that protect water quality and supply, while providing opportunity for public input. Current environmental regulations should not be weakened.** Over 1400 supporters of the Bad River Watershed Association signed in support of this statement on a petition that was delivered to all Wisconsin legislators in October of this year.

The Bad River watershed is comprised of over 1000 square miles of land. There are approximately 125 trout streams in the watershed. Gathering water from five subwatersheds, these rivers flow from headwaters in the Chequamegon-Nicolet National Forest, through the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Tribes of Chippewa Indian Reservation, to the Kakagon Slough—a pristine, wild place which is the largest and healthiest remaining estuary in the Great Lakes, and which provides abundant habitat for the wild rice and fish populations so important to the Tribe’s heritage and life today. Because of our name, people often assume we are a tribal entity, or that we work for the tribe. While we have, at times, done joint water quality monitoring in the watershed, we are not a tribal entity, and our work is focused primarily in parts of the watershed not on tribal land.

We have a large number of citizen volunteers involved in water quality monitoring and we work with towns and counties to do habitat restoration work in order to improve flow, fish passage, and to slow erosion in the watershed.

We believe that LRB 3520 is a bill which weakens current environmental standards, will allow for a deterioration of water quality in the State of Wisconsin, and robs local citizens and municipalities of input on the permitting process for mines. As local citizens weigh the importance of an improved economy with a need to ensure that there is clean and abundant water presently, and for future generations, we rely heavily on elected officials and the Department of Natural Resources to uphold the long tradition of wise stewardship over natural

resources as development is considered. LRB 3520 minimizes the importance of stewardship of resources and puts corporate mining interests as the highest priority.

Over the last five days I've spent most of each day reading the bill, reading legislative counsel and legislative resource board analyses of the bill, and talked with associates about the implications of the bill. The first thing that needs to be said is that five days simply isn't enough time to read and understand a 183 page bill and speak intelligently to the committee about our concerns. That the committee and the Assembly think it illustrates your disregard for what we have to say about the pros and cons of the bill. While the Assembly chooses to deal with rewriting mining legislation in this way, the Senate Select Committee on Mining Jobs has been working on streamlining the permitting process while listening to the concerns of a wide group interests in that legislation. We find the Senate process consistent with a government that values the contributions and ideas of voters, and are disappointed with the Assembly's attempt at hijacking that process by introducing LRB 3520.

While there are definite concerns with the content of the bill itself, due to the limited amount of time we've been given to understand it, I'm going to allow other groups to articulate those, and let our frustration with the Assembly's approach to changing mining legislation be the substance of my comments.

Having said that, the amount of time that I've spent reading and research LRB 3520 leads us to conclude that the bill significantly weakens the ability of the DNR to make stewardship of natural resources a priority. It weakens the protections of water quality long valued in this State. It puts the interests of mining companies over the right of local citizens to know that industry in their communities will not pollute the water that we all drink, fish in and recreate in. It also shows that the local voice of concern regarding what happens to the place we call home is of such little note to the Assembly that you think it acceptable to write a bill of this magnitude over 6 months, but give folks like us a mere 5 days, one of which is taken up by driving to Milwaukee, to evaluate whether there is good law in it or not.

The Bad River Watershed Association is an organization that believes the best decisions for the health of the watershed are made based on sound scientific data. We collect that data and share it with decision makers in order to protect the watershed from irreparable harm. We are diligent in our commitment to ensuring that current environmental standards are not weakened, that there will always be clean and abundant water for all of us, and that the opportunity for local people to be involved in the process is always protected. LRB 3520 weakens current environmental standards and significantly diminishes opportunity for local voices to have a say in what will impact our home for generations to come. We oppose LRB 3520.