

## How Wisconsin's Mining Law Works for People, Water and Property Rights



*We've heard a lot about changes to mining laws lately. But what's really in the current law anyway? BRWA researched the topic and found important parts that should be maintained in any law related to mining. Sign the petition to tell law makers to not weaken current environmental regulations.*

**Clean groundwater** is the source of drinking water for almost everyone in the Gogebic/Penokee range. We need to be sure mining operations do not threaten our access to safe drinking water. Under existing Wisconsin state law:

- A permit sets conditions on the "location, depth, pumping capacity, rate of flow, and ultimate use" of all high capacity wells (those that draw over 100,000 gallons/day).
- The permit process requires adequate groundwater testing to accurately predict the effects of mining
- Pumping of water cannot harm public or private water supplies.
- Trout streams and designated Outstanding Resource Waters (like the Tyler Forks River) may not be impaired from groundwater withdrawals.

**Clean lakes, rivers and streams** are found throughout the Gogebic/Penokee range, eventually flowing to the Bad River Sloughs and Lake Superior. We need to be sure that changes to Wisconsin's mining law do not compromise our clean lakes, rivers, and streams. Under existing Wisconsin state law:

- Mining permit applicants must assure that runoff from a mine site will not cause soil erosion, flooding, or pollution of ground or surface waters.
- Mining may not cause irreparable damage to a lake or stream.
- Mining wastes cannot be disposed of near private properties or next to rivers or lakes where flooding could cause downstream pollution and/or harm waterfront properties.
- Waterfront property owners are ensured minimum stream flows when water withdrawal is allowed.

**Wetlands play a big role** in keeping rivers and streams clean. They filter pollutants, soak up and slowly release excess runoff, and provide many animals with a place to live. Federal laws apply to some wetlands, and state laws apply to others. We need to be sure that Wisconsin's mining law adequately maintains wetland values that keep our water clean and control flooding. Under existing Wisconsin state law:

- Water that is discharged into wetlands must meet minimum water quality standards.
- If wetlands suffer any significant adverse impacts, wetlands must be restored in the same area.
- The important benefits that wetlands provide – protection from flooding, recharging groundwater, and providing habitat for wildlife – must be maintained.

**Accountability to the local community** will assure that the questions and concerns of local people are heard and addressed. We need to be sure that Wisconsin's mining law will not compromise the ability of local people to have a say in how mining projects may affect them. Under existing Wisconsin state law:

- Local Impact Committees provide a way for people most affected by mining activities to communicate directly with mining companies and negotiate agreements in their best interest (minimum local hiring provisions for mine jobs or times when blasting may occur, for example).
- During the permitting process, an Environmental Impact Statement evaluates long and short-term impacts on the local economy, infrastructure, schools and medical facilities. Taxes on the mine's profits provide funds for local impacts on infrastructure and job loss when mining activity is reduced.
- Mining companies are held financially responsible for environmental problems occurring during and after mining operations (e.g. groundwater contamination).