Thousands act to protect Boundary Waters

Public takes stand against toxic mines

This summer, Environment Minnesota staff fanned out across the state and talked to tens of thousands of Minnesotans about our campaign to protect the Boundary Waters and Lake Superior from the threat of sulfide mining pollution.

As the review period for the proposed PolyMet mine nears, and Twin Metals continues to push its mine proposal, our citizen outreach helped educate citizens and mobilize massive public support for protecting the Boundary Waters and Lake Superior. It also put strong pressure on the Environmental Protection Agency to reject these dangerous mines, which threaten northeastern Minnesota.

Sulfide mining poses major threats

These sulfide mines—the proposed PolyMet mine near Lake Superior, and the proposed Twin Metals mine near the Boundary Waters—would pose unacceptable threats to these precious waters.

Runoff from sulfide mining creates sulfuric acid and increases mercury contamination, killing fish and making water unsafe to drink. This toxic pollution could easily leach into the waterways that feed the Boundary Waters and Lake Superior.

23,500 conversations

PolyMet’s mine proposal will soon be coming before the EPA for review. To block this dangerous mine, Environment Minnesota is talking to Minnesotans and building broad public support for our precious waters.

Environment Minnesota staff pounded the pavement and had face-to-face conversations about the dangers of sulfide mining with more than 23,500 Minnesotans this summer. In addition, we collected nearly 10,000 petition signatures to the EPA opposing sulfide mining. We also held a canoe rally, which garnered media attention and showed that the public opposes mines that would threaten the Boundary Waters.

As the PolyMet mine reviews draws closer, Environment Minnesota will continue to talk to thousands of people across the state, meet directly with decision-makers, and show the EPA that Minnesotans don’t want sulfide mining near the Boundary Waters, Lake Superior, or any of our precious water resources.

To learn more about our campaign to protect the Boundary Waters and Lake Superior from toxic sulfide mining, visit www.EnvironmentMinnesota.org.
Recent action

Progress for Minneapolis Energy Options
In recent months, the Minneapolis Energy Options coalition that Environment Minnesota helped form has made strong headway in its campaign to build a clean, renewable, local energy future for Minneapolis.

The city’s utility contracts with Xcel Energy and Centerpoint Energy are expiring soon, and the coalition is pushing the city not to renew the contracts unless the utilities can guarantee that they’ll meet greenhouse gas reduction targets, increase renewable energy and promote energy efficiency. If this proves impossible, we are urging Minneapolis to consider municipalizing its utilities.

In June, the coalition sponsored a forum for Minneapolis’ mayoral candidates to discuss the city’s energy future and their plans for Minneapolis’ utilities. In addition, the DFL adopted Minneapolis Energy Options’ goals as part of its platform in Minneapolis. As the time for a decision approaches, we’ll keep pushing for a clean, renewable energy future for the city.

President Obama unveils plan to fight global warming
In June, President Obama announced a climate plan that will set limits on carbon pollution from power plants, advance energy efficiency and increase the nation’s commitment to renewable energy.

"President Obama responded to the millions of Americans who have spoken out on behalf of their communities and their families, urging him to lead on climate change,” said Madeline Page, field organizer for Environment Minnesota.

"Carbon pollution from power plants is a huge part of the global warming problem. Today, President Obama acknowledged this and mapped out a plan for cleaning up the pollution,” said Page. “We also know that this plan is just one important step in a multi-year effort, and that the proof of the plan’s success will be in the pudding. Environment Minnesota stands ready to assist the president in following through on this critical commitment.”

To our members

In May, Environment Minnesota won an exciting and hard-fought victory on our Solar Works for Minnesota campaign, passing a new law in Minnesota that will jumpstart a 30-fold increase in the amount of clean, renewable solar energy Minnesota produces.

The Dayton administration released a new report this summer that documents the very serious problem of nitrogen pollution from agriculture, a good sign that the state is ready to stand up to powerful agribusinesses and take action to protect and restore our rivers and streams.

And over the course of the summer, we collected and delivered nearly 10,000 petitions to the Environmental Protection Agency in opposition to the PolyMet open-pit mining project in an effort to protect Lake Superior, and the Boundary Waters, from sulfide mining pollution.

It’s a crucial time on all these fronts, and we’re so glad to have you with us.

Sincerely,
Samantha Chadwick
Advocate
Earlier this year, Environment Minnesota won a major victory when the Legislature passed a bill requiring a more than 30-fold increase in solar power by the end of the decade.

The bill established a solar standard that will require investor-owned utilities to provide 1.5% of the state’s power from solar energy by 2020. The bill also sets a goal of getting 10% of Minnesota’s electricity from the sun by 2030 and includes other measures that will help lay the groundwork for a very significant expansion of solar energy.

Culmination of years of work
Three years ago, Environment Minnesota helped form Solar Works for MN, a coalition that has grown to include more than 150 environmental groups, civic organizations, labor unions and businesses. The coalition is united around a goal of getting 10% of Minnesota’s power from solar by 2030. This year, Environment Minnesota also became a member of the Clean Energy and Jobs Campaign, a new coalition formed to promote the same solar goals as well as an expansion of wind power and energy efficiency.

“Over the past three years, we’ve spoken to tens of thousands of Minnesotans about solar energy,” said Environment Minnesota Advocate Samantha Chadwick. “Citizens love it because it’s clean, local and because it is a potent symbol for a smarter, cleaner energy future. This bill gives solar the boost it needs just at the right time and will go a long way to expanding access to solar for homes, businesses and local governments.”

Last year, Gov. Mark Dayton embraced our 10% goal, and in his State of the State address, called for legislators to pass policy establishing a cleaner, more sustainable energy future. This session, Rep. Will Morgan and Sen. Chris Eaton introduced the Solar Energy Jobs Act, which was included in the Omnibus Energy package and shepherded through the committee process by Rep. Melissa Hortman and Sen. John Marty.

10% solar by 2030
The bill’s central requirement—that all investor-owned utilities get 1.5% of their electricity from solar—is estimated to expand solar from today’s 13 MW to 450 MW by 2020. The bill also established a goal of reaching 10% solar by 2030. In addition, it contained a number of strong measures that will boost solar in Minnesota.

The bill at one point also included a provision that would have increased Minnesota’s Renewable Energy Standard (currently 25% by 2025) to 40% by 2030. Ultimately, the Legislature opted not to expand the RES this year. “We still have much work to do to meet our energy and environmental challenges with efficient, clean and renewable energy,” said Chadwick. “But this bill takes us a few major steps forward.”

A conversation with Jim Gurley
Recently, Environment Minnesota talked with Jim Gurley of Winona County, a leader in the movement against silica sand mining, or “frac sand” mining. Frac sand is used in the hydraulic fracturing, or “fracking,” process. He spoke about the negative impacts of mining for frac sand, as well as efforts to stop it.

Frac sand mining: What is it? Why is it concerning?
The sand is used in the fracking process to drill for oil and gas. Minnesota and Wisconsin farmland and river bluffs contain the right kind of sand, so the oil and gas industry has been buying or leasing land, and often obtaining permits with threats of lawsuits against local governments that don’t cooperate.

What are citizens fighting for?
Citizens’ opposition to frac sand mining stems from grave concerns, including: the destruction of land due to strip mining; the danger and cost of hundreds of semis on otherwise quiet rural roads; health impacts, including silicosis, lung cancer and contaminated water; negative impacts on tourism; and fractured communities.

How can people across the state help the effort?
Concerned citizens can learn more from local groups like Winona Area Citizens Concerned About Silica Mining, visit websites like www.sandpointtimes.com or www.thepriceofsand.com, and contact Gov. Mark Dayton and state legislators to tell them we need a state moratorium on frac sand mining, and time to better understand the impacts and put protections in place.
It's shocking that in a state that places such value on clean water and beautiful lakes and rivers, nearly half of our waterways are considered impaired and may be unsafe for swimming and fishing. Many of these impairments have resulted from pollution from agriculture, which is largely exempt from the Clean Water Act. Environment Minnesota has made it our goal to address this pollution in order to protect and restore Minnesota’s rivers and lakes. In June, our campaign took a big step forward when the Legislature passed the Clean Water Accountability Act (CWAA). The CWAA will target Clean Water Legacy funds to prevent agricultural pollution, help Minnesota identify pollution sources more effectively, and monitor cleanup progress using clear timelines and benchmarks.

This summer, the state released a report showing that 73% of the nitrate in Minnesota's rivers and streams comes from agricultural cropland. Now, Environment Minnesota is pushing our leaders to take action on this problem by setting standards that limit the amount of agricultural pollution to our rivers and streams, as well as laws that will hold polluters accountable for fouling our waterways.