Pushing back on Boundary Waters threat

Sulfide mines still under exploration

Thousands of people, and many Environment Minnesota members, came from around the state and the country over the summer to Minnesota’s pristine Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness. But while campers and canoeers splashed through the clear waters, or cast fishing lines in hope of the perfect catch, the threat of a new and dangerous type of mining just outside the wilderness continued to grow.

Sulfide mining (also called hard-rock or non-ferrous mining) can create acid mine drainage, which can leak sulfuric acid and heavy metal contaminants into nearby waters. In addition, sulfide mining companies have a poor history of protecting the environment.

Mining companies are exploring right at the edge of the Boundary Waters, and alongside precious waters like South Kawishiwi River and Bald Eagle Lake. If built, such mines would not only threaten these waters, but the Boundary Waters as well. One company is already undertaking exploratory drilling under Birch Lake, whose waters flow back into the BWCA.

Building support for the BWCA

Environment Minnesota staff spent the summer building public support for protecting the Boundary Waters. Through thousands of face-to-face conversations, phone calls and e-mails from members and supporters, we heard from Minnesotans who really care about protecting one of Minnesota’s most treasured places.

The mining companies claim they won’t pollute, and that they have the technology to contain toxics exposed by the mines. But they don’t have the track record to back up these claims. Nearby states that have allowed sulfide mining are watching it pollute their water with sulfuric acid, making it undrinkable and destroying ecosystems. Cleanup is extremely costly and sometimes impossible, and taxpayers frequently foot the bill.

Environment Minnesota is working to make sure the Boundary Waters are protected and pristine, so future generations of Minnesotans have the chance to experience their irreplaceable beauty.

We’re calling on the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to block any new mines that could pollute the Boundary Waters, degrade water quality, or raise pollution above established levels.

BWCA stories

Read about Environment Minnesota Director Ken Bradley’s BWCA canoe trip this summer—and then share your own story with us! Go to:

www.EnvironmentMinnesota.org/action/boundary-waters-story
Who doesn’t love good food and great conversation? When you look at it that way, it makes sense that our first Green Ideas and Ham breakfast forum in June was a success. Thanks to those of you who joined us at the Red Stag Supperclub in Minneapolis. We all learned a bit about property-assessed clean energy, a program that helps homeowners cut the up-front costs of solar power (and, of course, we got an amazing breakfast).

Green Ideas & Ham has already started back up for the fall, with breakfast the second to last Tuesday of each month from 8 a.m. to around 9 a.m. Keep track of the topics for future events and get directions to the Red Stag by checking your e-mail, keeping up with our website, or following us on Facebook or Twitter.

We want you to be part of the dialogue, and we need your vote on future topics to be discussed.

Sincerely,

Ken Bradley
Director

Environment Minnesota
Over the past several months, we’ve released research detailing the reasons why nuclear power is not the way toward a clean energy future. But early this spring, the Obama administration announced that it would help finance two new nuclear reactors at the Vogtle nuclear power station in Georgia, offering an $8.33 billion loan guarantee to Georgia Power (a subsidiary of Southern Company) and two other companies invested in the project.

The administration maintained that the investment was necessary to create jobs, stimulate our economy, and protect the planet from global warming. But it’s really an expensive gamble on a technology with a long history of bankrupting utilities and soaking ratepayers. New nuclear reactors are not cheap, not clean, and will set America back in the race against global warming. Most importantly, they are not necessary. Clean energy technologies can begin cutting global warming pollution right away, do so at lower cost and with less risk, and create more jobs in the process. There is an extremely high risk that taxpayers will be on the hook if the Vogtle loan guarantee proceeds. The loan guarantee is an up-front bailout that will enable Southern Company to make an economically unwise investment. Into the fall, we’ll be researching and documenting the most effective and economic ways to move toward a clean energy future.

Clean cars

Environment Minnesota released our report, “Plug-in Cars: Powering America Toward a Clean Energy Future,” with the United Auto Workers and state legislators. We’ve also been working to educate our leaders about the importance of building electric vehicles and the infrastructure and systems that support them. It’s catching on. Our report and field work has encouraged other important stakeholder groups to join us in working to promote clean car policies in the next legislative session. We are excited to have an even broader coalition of supporters to work with as we move forward.

In May, President Obama announced historic new clean car standards, which Environment Minnesota supported. The rules are expected to cut gasoline consumption by more than 11 billion gallons per year in 2016, nearly as much as all the vehicles in Texas use annually. Now we are calling on the Obama administration to strengthen the clean car standards. Auto companies can achieve even more by investing in available technologies, including hybrid and electric vehicles.

And the outlook for electric vehicles is good. A report released in August by Vice President Joe Biden and Energy Secretary Steven Chu concluded that the cost of batteries for electric vehicles would be reduced 70 percent by 2015. We need to build a first-class public transportation system, the infrastructure to support electric vehicles, and ensure that we develop communities that support active transportation choices, like walking and biking—using bike-friendly cities like Minneapolis as examples. We can have American-made electric cars instead of more air pollution, walkable communities and public transit instead of price shocks at the pump, and clean electricity instead of oil spills.

Defeating a handout for Big Oil

As oil flowed into the Gulf of Mexico in June, Sens. Al Franken and Amy Klobuchar voted against a binding resolution to increase America’s dependence on oil and block Clean Air Act rules. The measure, dubbed the “Dirty Air Act,” would have crippled future attempts to reduce our dependence on oil by blocking any regulation of global warming pollution—including new federal clean car standards.

Getting off of oil permanently

Environment Minnesota is part of a major new program to make the transition to a clean energy future. Building on the clean cars victory and the setback for Big Oil after the defeat of the Dirty Air Act, we’re bringing together a coalition of environmental groups, public health organizations, consumer advocates and national security groups to build a sustained campaign to end America’s addiction to oil.

Get links to the latest reports

Visit our website to find recent reports on clean energy:

www.EnvironmentMinnesota.org/reports

Cleaner cars, cleaner air

While we’ve seen some setbacks this year for the environment on the national level, we’re continuing to push for smarter policies that will lead the nation toward a clean energy future.

Nuclear not the way to clean energy future

Over the past several months, we’ve released research detailing the reasons why nuclear power is not the way toward a clean energy future. But early this spring, the Obama administration announced that it would help finance two new nuclear reactors at the Vogtle nuclear power station in Georgia, offering an $8.33 billion loan guarantee to Georgia Power (a subsidiary of Southern Company) and two other companies invested in the project.

The administration maintained that the investment was necessary to create jobs, stimulate our economy, and protect the planet from global warming. But it’s really an expensive gamble on a technology with a long history of bankrupting utilities and soaking ratepayers.

New nuclear reactors are not cheap, not clean, and will set America back in the race against global warming. Most importantly, they are not necessary. Clean energy technologies can begin cutting global warming pollution right away, do so at lower cost and with less risk, and create more jobs in the process. There is an extremely high risk that taxpayers will be on the hook if the Vogtle loan guarantee proceeds. The loan guarantee is an up-front bailout that will enable Southern Company to make an economically unwise investment. Into the fall, we’ll be researching and documenting the most effective and economic ways to move toward a clean energy future.
Strides on solar energy

Solar energy is the cleanest, most abundant renewable energy source available. According to a recently released report by the Obama administration, the cost of solar power will be cut in half by 2015, making it cost-competitive with traditional energy sources. Environment Minnesota is organizing to lead the effort to harness that potential for our state’s economy and environment. We are working to pass a standard requiring 10 percent of our energy to come from the sun by 2030.

In 2007, Minnesota passed a law that requires 25 percent of our electricity to be produced by renewable electricity by 2025. The law has successfully promoted wind development, but it has done little to stimulate solar energy use. We will be working this coming session to protect that standard, and to create a separate standard that will require that we get an additional 10 percent of our electricity from the sun by 2030. That would mean that by 2030, 35 percent of our state’s total electricity use would come from renewable sources right here in Minnesota. This will allow manufacturers and utilities to plan together and create our own low-cost electricity, create jobs and reduce our dependence on foreign oil and polluting fossil fuel companies.

Wind turbines near Lake Benton.

Call your state legislator and ask him or her to move us toward getting 10 percent of our electricity from the sun by 2030.

www.EnvironmentMinnesota.org

Design: Public Interest GRFX, (215) 985-1113
Editor: Ken Bradley | Primary contributors: Annie Mackin, Maria Figliola
Printed on recycled paper.