



Commentary on SB395/AB499 Legislation to Lift Mining Moratorium

Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians

President Joseph Wildcat, Sr. October 20, 2017

Lac du Flambeau Tribe: Life-Sustaining Resources Trump Deep Cost of Mining

Wisconsin is about to jump into a deep hole. State legislators stand ready to repeal the current moratorium on industrial acid mining by passing Senate Bill 395 and Assembly Bill 499. Those who vote for this bill set a course for costly, persistent environmental damage.

In fact, there's no reason to repeal the moratorium on industrial acid mining via SB395/AB499. Current law states this type of mining is allowable. Mining companies, however, have to prove they can use industrial acid mining techniques without harming the environment. To date, no proof exists.

We want economic development. We want jobs. We are unwilling, however, to sacrifice the health of life-sustaining natural resources—earth, air and water. Without these, we cease to exist.

SB395/AB499 will reverse a bi-partisan ban on harmful mining practices without proven environmental protections passed when Governor Scott Walker was in the state assembly. It will reverse a vote the governor cast as an assemblyman to protect our state's natural resources from industrial acid mining.

There are no proven technologies to ensure our natural resources are protected from industrial acid mining pollution. Therefore, we remain opposed to SB395/AB499 until there are proven protections in place for public health, safety and natural resources.

Has Mining Technology Advanced?

Some argue things change and mining has advanced. Perhaps. But we know for certain the Flambeau Mine, which proponents of SB395/AB499 say is a successful mine, is responsible for Flambeau River tributaries currently being classified as impaired and toxic, according to the Wisconsin DNR.

Another certainty is that if Wisconsin legislators lift the ban on harmful mining practices, more mines will open using a process known to produce acid as a byproduct of the mining process. To date there are zero mines—none—that had used this process and successfully prevented environmental damage.

Think about your favorite Wisconsin vacation spot. Would you want your children swimming in acid lakes and rivers? Would you eat fish from polluted rivers? The DNR, for example, has issued fish health advisories warning people about eating fish in every area across the state. This is a constant fight to protect and preserve natural resources. It's a battle with many fronts. Acid mining is just one.

As a Tribe, our environmental standards exceed federal and state standards for environmental protection. For hundreds of years, we have taken up the charge to protect and preserve the environment for generations yet to experience these life-sustaining natural resources. Our opposition to SB395/AB499 continues our commitment to environmental stewardship.

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Other Considerations

Acid mine drainage is a serious, long-term problem without an easy clean-up solution. There are Roman-era mines more than 1500-years-old still draining acid mining toxins. If it were that easy to clean up these mines, it seems someone would have cleaned it up by now.

John Torinus, a successful business leader in West Bend, Wis., recently wrote an insightful piece on economics and environment. "Somehow," he writes, "GOP legislators have bought the erroneous theory that the environment and economy are an either-or proposition. Nothing could be more wrong. Advances for the economy and the environment are complementary, not competing."

Outdoor enthusiasts recently were outraged by a state government proposal to kill the Wisconsin Natural Resources Magazine published by the DNR. Their passion for the printed page would be a powerful voice if applied to rallying in defense of the natural resources that produce the very environment and wildlife captured in the magazine's images and articles.

Finally, Wisconsin's north woods depends on a \$20 billion tourism industry. This recurring revenue is a major, sustainable economic engine for all of us. Tourism depends largely on the health of natural resources. By lifting the acid mining moratorium, those natural resources are threatened for a limited amount of economic gain. Once the mine closes, the negative impact to natural resources remains. And billions of dollars are threatened in tourism as a result.

Opposition to Acid Mining Bills

The Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians makes decisions with seven generations in mind. We ask how our decisions today impact those who come after us hundreds of years from now. We consider it the Tribe's responsibility to preserve and protect the earth, the air, and the water we all need to survive. It's part of our culture. It's part of our values.

The health of the earth, air and water is at the core of who we are as a people. This has been a guiding principle for us well before the United States even existed. We share a deep passion and respect for nature with hunters, fishers, birders, hikers and all who enjoy the outdoors in Wisconsin. We value clean land, air and water.

Therefore, the Lac du Flambeau Tribe asks everyone across the State of Wisconsin who cares about balancing economic development with environmental protections to call or email their legislators today.

Please don't wait. SB395/AB499 are advancing quickly to repeal industrial acid mining regulations. These bills have the backing of significant industry resources who stand to gain monetarily without concern for those who choose to live and visit the Wisconsin north woods long after the mine gives up all its treasure.

Joseph Wildcat, Sr., is President of the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians, whose reservation resides just west of Minoqua, Wis. in Vilas, Iron and Oneida Counties.

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