

## **Metallic Sulfide Mining Project**

It is a sad day in the Upper Peninsula. Michigan's DEQ has approved aspects of the Kennecott Corporation's [owned by Rio Tinto] plan to start a metallic sulfide mine in northern Marquette County. (Rio Tinto is considering a take-over bid. Believe it or not, China may buy it.) Approval has been granted without an independent hydrological study. We simply do not know the extent to which underground streams and rivers permeate the Great Lakes, the source of about 22% of the world's fresh water supply.

Today we are dependent on oil. Not very far into the future much of the world's population will be dependent upon the "owners" of fresh water. What side of this forthcoming global fresh water scarcity and dependency fulcrum do we want to be on. Duh???

According to the CIA there are currently over 250 water conflicts in the world. Approximately 1.2 billion people throughout the world are without suitable drinking water. Water-borne diseases such as cholera, and polio that those 1.2 billion people encounter on an almost daily basis cause an estimated eighty percent of the world's sicknesses. (Contested Environments. Water International, 25 pages 11-32, 2003). Globally, water scarcity already affects four out of every 10 people. The situation is getting worse due to population growth, urbanization and increased domestic and industrial water use. By 2015 two-thirds of the world's population will be living in water-stressed areas. (World Health Organization, 2007) Due to massive irrigation to support dry land agriculture and the destruction of our wetlands, four major aquifers in the U.S are being depleted at rates well beyond natural recharging rates. A pipeline to send water to the arid, over-developed, unsustainable southwestern states has already been leaked in the presidential primary contests by Bill Richardson, former Governor of New Mexico.

Consider this while you turn on your tap water:

Nickel sulfide mining has not been proven environmentally safe anywhere in the world. It is too great a health risk in the only State in the Union that is surrounded by fresh water lakes. According to the EPA, acid mine drainage from sulfide mining has already polluted more than 12,000 miles of rivers and streams and over 180,000 acres of lakes and impoundments in the United States. Kennecott Minerals is on the EPA's list of worst polluters. "U.S. taxpayers currently face a liability of up to \$12 billion to clean up and restore hard rock mines. To damage the environment today is considered morally culpable."

Jared Diamond, Ph.D.

Pulitzer award-winning author of *Societal Collapse, Guns, Germs and Steel*

By JOHN PEPIN, The Mining Journal Staff Writer, December 15, 2007

MARQUETTE — In the wake of Michigan Department of Environmental Quality approvals Friday for three principal permits for a controversial Kennecott Eagle Minerals Company nickel and copper mine in northern Marquette County, proponents and opponents are planning their next moves.

Kennecott officials are eyeing a late spring start for major construction on their project, which is expected to take two years. Though he concedes approvals are still needed from the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Kennecott Eagle Project General Manager Jon Cherry said he was pleased with Friday's DEQ permit announcement.

“This is good news not only for Kennecott, but also for job creation, building a stronger economy, and providing additional opportunities for area businesses to grow,” Cherry said. “We are very pleased that our efforts over the last several years to work with regulators and many parties in the community to develop a good, environmentally responsible project have been realized. We look forward to getting the project underway.”

Meanwhile, opponents promising a legal challenge still hope to derail the project they say is a dangerous threat to mine workers and water resources.

“(The) National Wildlife Federation and key allies that share our concerns are prepared to challenge these permits because they do not meet legal standards,” said Michelle Halley, an attorney with the National Wildlife Federation in Marquette. “We cannot stand idly by while the DEQ permits fatally flawed projects.”

Halley said she and other opponents are currently considering a variety of administrative and court actions. “We need time to review the final permit conditions and will proceed after that,” Halley said.

Kennecott filed its more than 8,000-page permit application for the mine with the state in February 2006. State DEQ officials issued a preliminary approval for the mine earlier this year. Public comment was then solicited before the final DEQ decision was made.

The DEQ granted approval for a DEQ Air Use Permit, DEQ Groundwater Discharge Permit and DEQ Nonferrous Metallic Mineral Mining Permit.

A Michigan Department of Natural Resources director decision is expected Jan. 10 on whether to grant permits regarding Kennecott's plan for reclaiming the site once mining ends, and a land surface use lease agreement for the area where above-ground operations will take place.

Officials with the DNR urged approval of those leases earlier this month, while asking Kennecott for more information on a few items.

Kennecott is also awaiting approval of an EPA permit the company applied for several months ago. No timetable has been set for that permit decision. But Friday, Cherry said he expects a ruling on the permit — which he says largely duplicates information the mining company provided to the state—to be made “in the near future.”

Officials with the DEQ say their department's decision follows a period of extensive review of public comments and supporting information. Roughly 4,000 public comments were received by the state on the project, which were submitted in writing or through testimony at public hearings

in Marquette and Lansing. The DEQ is required to make its decision based solely on whether a proposal meets mining law standards. “This has been one of the most thorough reviews of an application ever done by this agency,” said DEQ Director Steven E. Chester. “In the end, Kennecott’s proposal met the high standard set by Michigan’s environmental laws.”

The Kennecott project is the first to be subject to Michigan’s new Nonferrous Metallic Mineral Mining rules that were enacted in response to concerns over potential environmental impacts from mining of metallic sulfide ores. The rules, which are reportedly among the most stringent in the nation, were drafted and agreed to by a work group that included representatives from environmental, business and mining organizations, DEQ officials said.

Amy Clickner, chief executive officer of the Lake Superior Community Partnership [a pro-business organization], said her organization is pleased with the DEQ’s decision and expects the stringent mining rules will ensure protection of the local natural resources. “This community has been a part of the lengthy, yet vital, process crafted by the 2004 legislation. That legislation has resulted in permits that contain detailed conditions to ensure the protection of our environment,” Clickner said. “Our proud mining heritage in Marquette County has existed in harmony with our natural beauty and recreation for over 165 years, providing the opportunity for citizens and businesses to prosper.” Clickner added, “The Michigan DEQ, under the direction of Director Steven Chester, should be commended on their diligence and commitment to the integrity of this process and the citizens of Michigan. We look forward to working with our new corporate partner, Kennecott Minerals.”

But environmental opponents to the project say the mine doesn’t measure up to the mining law standards. “We are extremely disappointed that after all the work which went into crafting the law governing non-ferrous mining in Michigan that the DEQ has chosen to simply ignore key components of that law,” said Anne Woiwode, state director of the Sierra Club Michigan Chapter. “They’ve granted Kennecott a permit which clearly doesn’t even meet the intent, let alone the letter of the law.”

Cynthia Pryor, executive director of the Yellow Dog Watershed Preserve, said she believes fear is what is motivating the DEQ. “Unfortunately, Kennecott is holding the State of Michigan hostage to the notion that they will sue them for takings if this mine is not permitted. Why else would our government — who is bound to protect us — sell our lands, our waters and our natural resources to this company from England, despite the will of the people and the scientific realities of the project,” Pryor asked. Save the Wild UP, the grassroots group that has vocally opposed the project, believes the state has sold out the people of the Upper Peninsula.

“DEQ has made a charade of listening to the public. Governor Granholm seems willing to hold her nose and allow the inevitable nasty pollution of the U.P. and the Great Lakes,” said Dick Huey, co-founder of Save the Wild UP.

Cherry said Kennecott has designed the Eagle Project for the smallest environmental footprint possible. The mine will be completely underground, accessed through a tunnel opening located in the same area where a water treatment plant, ore loading equipment and other facilities will be contained to less than 100 acres.

All above-ground facilities will be removed once mining ends to restore the area to its current conditions. The mine itself will be backfilled as mining occurs to protect workers inside, and the earth's surface. Ore will be processed off site, Cherry said. According to Cherry, construction and operation of the project will mean the making of more than 500 new local jobs, including those directly connected with Eagle, and others created as a result of the project's presence.

Construction will trigger the start of tax payments to local communities. The permit review process has included several series of public hearings and comment periods.

Cherry said the company would continue its efforts to engage with residents as the project moves forward. "It's important to us that we listen to and address people's concerns — that responsibility continues."