

Clean Wisconsin

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Wisconsin Assembly Passes Open-Pit Mining Bill Despite Opposition

Bill rolls back environmental protections, eliminates accountability for mining companies

MADISON – The Wisconsin Assembly passed AB 426, the Assembly Open-Pit Mining Bill, on a party-line vote today despite strong public opposition to the bill.

“Assembly Republicans voted today to roll back commonsense environmental protections, silence the voice of the public, and eliminate accountability for mining corporations,” says Amber Meyer Smith, government relations director at Clean Wisconsin. “Their actions stand in contrast to the will of Wisconsin citizens and jeopardize the health of our families for the profit of out-of-state mining corporations.”

The attempt to rewrite Wisconsin’s mining laws comes as Gogebic Taconite, a subsidiary of the West Virginia-based mining corporation the Cline Group, proposes to build a massive open-pit iron mine in Northern Wisconsin. At legislative hearings held in West Allis and Hurley, opponents of the Mining Bill significantly outnumbered supporters, and residents who live near the proposed mine waited hours to express their concerns that this legislation would threaten the quality of their water and the health of their families.

“This legislation puts the profits of out-of-state mining executives ahead of the health of my family,” says Pete Rasmussen, a resident of Marengo and co-founder of the Penokee Hills Education Project. “Our children will have to live with the consequences of a mine long after the resources run out and mine officials pack their bags and head for another state. Our laws should protect us and our children, not give free reign to mining corporations that have no interest in protecting Wisconsin’s environment.”

While the Assembly passed the legislation today, the Senate has yet to introduce any mining legislation. In September, Senate Majority Leader Scott Fitzgerald announced the formation of a Senate Select Committee for reviewing mining legislation.

In October, a poll from the Wisconsin Policy Research Institute, a conservative organization, showed that a majority of Wisconsin residents oppose changing our mining laws. Only 38 percent of Wisconsinites favor streamlining environmental regulations to create mining jobs in Northern Wisconsin, while 51 percent oppose weakening environmental regulations, according to the poll.

“It’s clear that Wisconsin residents want our mining laws to remain strong, and to continue to protect our beautiful natural resources,” says Smith. “We encourage our senators to reject the Assembly bill and stand with the people of Wisconsin, not out-of-state mining executives.”

A fact sheet about the mining bill passed today is available at www.cleanwisconsin.org/miningfacts.

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Clean Wisconsin, an environmental advocacy organization, protects Wisconsin’s clean water and air and advocates for clean energy by being an effective voice in the state legislature and by holding elected officials and polluters accountable. Founded in 1970 as Wisconsin’s Environmental Decade, Clean Wisconsin exposes corporate polluters, makes sure existing environmental laws are enforced, and educates citizens and businesses. On behalf of its 10,000 members and its coalition partners, Clean Wisconsin protects the special places that make Wisconsin such a wonderful place to live, work and play. 608-251-7020, information@cleanwisconsin.org, www.cleanwisconsin.org.