

Northern Wisconsin is home to some of the most beautiful lakes, rivers, and forests in the Midwest – if not the world. It is also home to an aging population and unemployment rates that lag behind the rest of the state.

Over the last 15 years, the older generation has been retiring and the younger generation continues to move elsewhere in search of greater opportunities. Other factors have compounded this loss of population: less forestry habitat management on the national forests and a school funding formula that hurts the property-rich tourism communities. Many factors have caused businesses in northern Wisconsin to dwindle and close. To Southern Wisconsin residents this may seem inconsequential. Many think tourism jobs are enough to sustain the economy.

Unfortunately, the seasonality, low wages and boom and bust nature of the Tourism industry are not enough to sustain vibrant communities. Northern Wisconsin needs a balanced economy to stem the exodus of young people and to have opportunity available for the next generation. Mining could provide the necessary spark for industry and population growth in the Northwoods.

Across the borders in Michigan and Minnesota, mining towns are reawakening. The Eagle Mine in Upper Michigan for example, currently employs several hundred people. These are family sustaining jobs. The total economic impact from just this one mine has been estimated at \$2 billion.

Mining could be an anchor industry in Northern Wisconsin. We have the natural resources and technical knowhow to mine safely and responsibly right here in the Badger state. The Flambeau Mine in western Wisconsin is an example of a mine that was safely operated, closed, and reclaimed. It now provides recreational opportunities. Mining could provide jobs and opportunity for rural residents and help stabilize and grow industry in northern Wisconsin. With the proper tax policy, it could provide additional tax revenue to the local communities for much needed infrastructure improvements.

Along the same lines, mining may very well be the industry to revitalize freight rail in our region. As the former five-year chair of the Northwoods Rail Transit Commission, a collection of 20 Wisconsin and Michigan counties working to restore rail service in the Great Lakes area, I strongly believe that rail service is critical to the survival of existing businesses and communities in northern Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula. However, over the last five years, it has become very difficult for manufacturing businesses to find affordable and reliable freight service. It is less and less profitable for rail line operators to maintain and service our light density rail line network.

Mining would provide long term freight contracts that would compel rail line operators to restore and upgrade rail lines in our region, or lease the lines to a short line operator who is interested in doing so. This would reduce transportation costs for businesses, including our forest products and paper industries, and would make our region more attractive for other manufacturing businesses looking to expand or relocate to our area.

Northern Wisconsin needs a diverse economy to grow and prosper. We don't need to choose mining over tourism – we can have both. Mining can be done both safely and responsibly. We need to take advantage of the opportunity to bolster industry in rural Wisconsin.



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