



It's Our Nature

Newsletter of the Fox Valley Sierra Group of the John Muir Chapter of the Sierra Club Vol. 12 Issue 1

PROGRAMS

February 9, 2012 • 7:00 PM

Cameron Moreland - TV 26

Popular local weatherman will share the myths and truths of weather.

March 8, 2012 • 7:00 PM

Reclaiming Lost Lands

Mark Dawson will explain how his company is redesigning old auto plants in Michigan.

April 12, 2012 • 7:00 PM

Travels in the Southwestern US

Don Lorenz' latest solo adventure, 33 days (sleeping in his van) and traveling 6,000 miles visiting national parks and monuments, Indian reservations, wilderness areas and historical sites - and taking thousands of pictures. During that time he participated in a week-long Sierra Club service trip in Utah, fixing trails and seeing old Anasazi sites (with a BLM archeologist). He visited Great Sand Dunes, Mesa Verde, Arches, Canyonlands, Cedar Mesa, Navajo tribal park, Gouldings trading post, Lake Powell, Paria wilderness, Lee's Ferry, the north rim of the Grand Canyon and Zion. He hiked, biked, explored, rebuilt trails, communed with wildlife, endured - and escaped from - bus loads of tourists and had a fantastic trip (celebrating his retirement this year).

May 10, 2012 • 7:00 PM

Annual Auction Fund-raiser

Randy Cannour who has been running our auction for years, and is a faithful supporter of Sierra Club will once again grace our stage to raise funds for our programs and projects. A cannot miss event, everyone start thinking of things to bring to the auction, and bring your spirit and checkbooks.

All programs are held at the wheelchair accessible Gordon Bubolz Nature Preserve, 4815 N. Lynndale Drive (County A) in Appleton, Wisconsin and are free and open to the public. Please join us! <http://www.bubolzpreserve.org/>

OUTINGS

February 11, Saturday

Snowshoe Hike at Skunk & Foster Lakes State Natural Area.

We'll combine a section of the Ice Age Trail with the trails at Skunk Lake to make two nice loops through the woods. Hilly terrain offers awesome views of the glacial pothole lakes below. Learn how this area was shaped by the glaciers. After our hike we'll head into nearby Amherst for lunch at Morning Star Coffee & Bistro. (<http://morningstarcoffeeandbistro.com>) If there isn't enough snow, we'll hike instead. Kelly Ramstack, 920-540-9139

February 25, Saturday

Snowshoe at Mosquito Hill Nature Center, New London.

2 hours of snowshoeing on easy trails along the Wolf River. Rentals available for \$3. (Arrive 15 minutes early if you need to rent). Small donation for trail fee. Bring a sack lunch if you would like to enjoy refueling inside the warm building after the hike. Leader will bring hot chocolate. Monny Hjerstedt, 920-725-5775 mhjerstedt@tds.net

Sunday, May 6.

Paddle down the Wolf River

From Shawano M (Lieg St) bridge to CCC bridge while some of the remaining sturgeon are swimming up the historic waterway. Ron Bruch approved trip! We will mostly be going through the Navarino Wildlife area. There are no landings between put-in and take-out. Class I water (moving water with few riffles and small waves; no obstructions.) You will need to provide your own canoe or kayak. We will shuttle from Lieg St. Landing. After return, learn more about the sturgeon's historic route and how it ends at the dam / Sturgeon Park in Shawano. Nancy Brown-Koeller 920 721-5431 (work); 920 830-6625 (home)

Sierra Club outings are offered solely because of the generosity of members willing to lead outings and share the experience with others. If you are interested in learning more please contact the FVSG Outing Chair Rich Krieg at eddyout@gmail.com or 920-660-3557.

Sierra Club Endorses the Recall of Gov. Walker

In November, after our last newsletter was published, the elected leaders of our state chapter of Sierra Club voted unanimously to endorse the recall of Gov. Walker and to ask Sierra Club members to help in the effort. This is part of the memo that was sent to chapter Sierra Club members on November 16.

Wisconsin has a long and proud legacy of protecting our environment. That proud legacy has been under full scale assault by Governor Scott Walker. That is why the John Muir Chapter's Executive Committee has voted unanimously to endorse the recall of Gov. Walker and to ask Sierra Club members to help in the effort.

While there are many reasons to recall Walker, his attack on environmental protection would surely be reason enough. Consider what Scott Walker has done to date:

- *Has effectively stopped all new wind energy projects in the state
- *Cut funding for the Gaylord Nelson -- Warren Knowles Stewardship Funding by 30%
- *Undermined Wisconsin nationally recognized energy conservation program
- *Abolished the state Office of Energy Independence
- *Carved out a special exemption from wetlands protections for a campaign contributor
- *Eliminated the requirement that municipal water supplies be disinfected
- *Called a special session for the purpose of passing legislation to roll back water pollution and wetlands law
- *Appointed as DNR Secretary a state Senator with one of the worst environment voting records in the Legislature.
- *Sought to severely weaken mining laws to benefit an Appalachian mining company that want to build a massive strip mine in our north woods.

If we just sit by and watch, Wisconsin will be a very different place. A place where our natural resources have scant protection -- where pollution is allowed and the North Woods are handed over to a strip mining corporation -- where any efforts to reduce our dependence on coal and oil are stifled.

Rollbacks of Wetlands Protections

Memo from Shahla Werner, John Muir Chapter Director, January 9, 2012

The New Year started with an attack on Wisconsin's legacy of wetlands and wildlife habitat, the Wetlands Deregulation bill (AB 463 / SB 368), which contains rollbacks that fundamentally undermine Wisconsin's current strong wetlands protection law.

Rollbacks of Wetlands Protections include:

- **No wetland are off-limits.** Deleting the statutory definition of ASNRI (Area of Special Natural Resource Interest) protected wetlands. ASNRI's are areas that possess ecological, cultural, aesthetic, educational, recreational or scientific values, including state natural areas, trout streams, and outstanding or exceptional resource waters.
- **Rolls back the "Avoid and Minimize" rule.** Eliminating a critical requirement that developers consider alternative sites that do not contain wetlands.
- **Allows wetland mitigation to be used as justification for wetland fill** by requiring consideration of mitigation too early in the permit review process.
- **Grants automatic approval of general wetland permits if DNR fails to meet the time restrictions.** Setting an arbitrary, aggressive time periods to allow DNR to review permit applications, regardless of site conditions, staffing levels or project complexity.

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From the Chair

January 2012, By Alan Lawrence FVSG Chair

I think most Sierra Club members generally understand environmental theories, but I am always amazed that much of America, including many in legislative leadership positions, apparently are clueless. Many of our leaders in Congress and state legislatures continue to ignore environmental considerations, proposing and supporting detrimental legislation. Sierra Club and its allies never seem to find rest.

The proposed Gogebic Taconite mine in northern Wisconsin is a prime example. A Canadian-based company wants to open a huge mine, presumably for iron ore. Previous experience demonstrates that hazardous sulfide is likely to be encountered in the mining process. The company, working with allies in the Wisconsin legislature, is pushing legislation that would fast-track this mine, forgoing real environmental impact studies. The legislation would also eliminate legal responsibility by the company to run an environmentally safe operation.

Proponents of the mine are correct in stating that the local residents need jobs. But it is entirely uncertain that many good permanent jobs would result for the local community. And it seems like an extremely risky proposition, considering the likely and certain risks to the environment and to the tourism industry, and the lack of legal responsibility by the mining company.

The Trans Canada Keystone XL pipeline to transport Canadian tar sands oil across the United States is another prime example of ignoring environmental considerations in preference for business considerations. Tar sands oils are extracted at huge environmental expense from vast surface mines in northern Canada. The tar sands are cooked until liquid oil is released. Awful air and water pollution is created, and the resulting "oil" is twice as expensive for Global Warming than traditional oil. This is a bad product, and we should discourage its production.

The Keystone XL pipeline is intended to bring this oil across our country, from Canada to the Gulf Coast of Texas. Texas refineries would refine this oil, and most of it would be sent into the world market. Ironically, this would increase the price Americans pay for this oil. Currently the US is practically the only customer for this oil, but the pipeline would force US consumers to compete with the rest of the world for the purchase of the commodity.

Many of our leaders are ignoring the environmental issues, and even the cost of oil to US consumers, focusing instead on possible jobs for construction workers who would build the pipeline. President Obama finds himself with a "difficult" choice. He can either recognize the concerns of environmentalists, or he can recognize the needs of Americans for construction jobs. Fortunately, President Obama recently made the decision to delay construction until better pipeline plans are presented. I wish he would also voice concerns about the production of the oil itself.

The current plans were to build the pipe across sensitive

environments, including the Ogallala Aquifer. The Wikipedia article, referencing a USGS Fact Sheet, says, "About 27 percent of the irrigated land in the United States overlies this aquifer system, which yields about 30 percent of the nation's ground water used for irrigation. In addition, the aquifer system provides drinking water to 82 percent of the people who live within the aquifer boundary". Furthermore, the tar sands pipeline that already delivers this oil to US consumers has demonstrated a very bad record for spilling oil.

Closer to home, and with much less publicity, a pyrolysis gasification plant has been proposed for construction in the Green Bay area. It has a good concept. Their stated goal is to "demonstrate the benefits of using waste as a fuel in an environmentally friendly manner. The plant disposes of waste by converting it to energy, rather than dumping or spreading it on landfills." However, many believe the process is likely to fail, will be a financial boondoggle, and should not be built. Our state Sierra Club chapter is cautiously against this plant. On principal alone, burning waste materials seems more wasteful than recycling them; and the recycling industry would be harmed if community waste was routinely burned.

Fracking for oil or gas, with its use of fracturing the ground below us and injections of poisonous liquids into the ground, is a growing industry. Sand is used in the fracking process, and Wisconsin sand has the necessary properties. Many sand quarries operate in Wisconsin to produce this sand, apparently with limited regulation and scrutiny. Again, the environmental impact is ignored for the sake of jobs, profits, and energy.

Recently our state legislature introduced the Wetlands Deregulation Bill (AB 463 / SB 368), which contains rollbacks that fundamentally undermine Wisconsin's current strong wetlands protection law. There is no science behind legislation like this.

I encourage you to research the above issues and come to your own conclusions. You may want to contact your legislators, at the state and federal level, with your concerns.

In November, after our last newsletter was published, the elected leaders of our state chapter of Sierra Club voted unanimously to endorse the recall of Gov. Walker and to ask Sierra Club members to help in the effort. Many of you have been involved in this process.

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Regrettably our January 12 meeting had to be cancelled due to a snow storm. The program has been rescheduled for April 12. I hope you can make it.

Thanks for reading my comments. As leader of our group I welcome your feedback.

Alan Lawrence, 920-730-9515 or alan_lawrence99@yahoo.com

Birding on the Brain

by Laura Menefee, a FVSG member who resides in Door County in a former dairy farmhouse.

We finally have snow. Only people up here in the North would understand how disappointing it would have been not finally to have had a “proper winter.” We pride ourselves on our survival skills, here in the North. We are not “snowbirds.” We are here for the duration.

Our Fall-like temperatures finally dipped down to 11°F, below zero at night. Another brief flirtation with the 30's and we are back once again in the single-digits. As I write, the air temperature reads 30°F, but it is howling a gale, here by the lake and the wind chill is 4 degrees.

When we consider “our snowbirds” of the avian species, however, we refer to birds who are here for the winter only. Today I watched a female dark-eyed junco for some time, sitting in my bridal veil bush, simply because I believed I saw an uncharacteristic amount of rust color on her rump and wondered if she was the Oregon subspecies, very rare out East. I don't keep a life list, I rarely “twitch” and I have yet to purchase a spotting scope. I watch birds simply because I enjoy it.

I am reading a book, *Rapt: Attention and the Focused Life*, by Winifred Gallagher (Penguin Press, 2009). In it she argues what many of us have become aware of in recent years: electronic “connectedness,” while convenient, has some potentially harmful consequences.

For instance, I recently had occasion to take my MacBook in for service to a “Genius Bar” at the Apple Store in Manhattan, where I was visiting my children for Christmas. It was convenient to get it done there -- there actual repair took only an hour -- because there is no Apple Store within a five hour drive for me and I was reluctant to send my now indispensable laptop through the mail. However, during the diagnostics, drop-off and pick-up, I had several hours to listen and observe the people around me, many there for problems with their iphones.

It has become catastrophic to have problems with our electronics. We have become intrinsically dependent on devices which did not exist mere decades ago. And while I enjoy the convenience of being able to research anything and everything from the comfort of my kitchen table, I sometimes wonder whether the truncated communications I receive from my children, which often take the form of text messages and e-mails, is a poor substitute for the lengthy if infrequent phone conversation, or the occasional letter.



Sharp-shinned Hawk, L. Menefee, 2011

One of my children becomes outright offended if anyone she is spending time with, in a living room or a cafe, spends any length of time checking messages. The other two are attached to their iphones at the navel. In *Rapt*, Gallagher synthesizes research we have been hearing about how children's brains are actually developing differently in order to facilitate “multi-tasking.” The result is that they lose the ability to concentrate meaningfully, or focus, for any length of time. She describes, for instance, that to accomplish any task which requires meaningful attention usually requires about 90 minutes of focus. Any distraction will require a 20 minute recovery before attaining the same, pre-distraction depth of focus.

My non-birder friends and relatives are frequently amazed when I can identify a road-side hawk, a shore bird, or an unseen

song bird by its call. However, I am only a novice birder. I spend time observing birds for the simple fact that I enjoy it.

This attention has allowed several observations this winter: I have seen no Nuthatches. There are few Juncos and fewer Chickadees. I even seem to have fewer Hairy and Downy woodpeckers, which were previously in abundance. By contrast, the Blue Jays and Cardinals seem about the same in number. While Goldfinches and Pine Siskins or Redpolls seem to alternate in terms of dominance at the feeders, I usually see at least a few of the non-dominant species. This year there are only Goldfinches.

I have read some reports of studies which suggest cell phones and cell phone towers may play a role in the Colony Collapse Disorder of honeybees, inhibiting a hive's ability to communicate--a necessary component of maintaining a hive. In some studies, placing a cell phone which transmitted and received calls in or near a hive caused the hive to “swarm,” or disperse.

While it is clear that habitat loss and agricultural chemicals play a major role in the decline of bird species, it is also known that window collisions, night-time lighting and, mysteriously until now, cell phone towers, exact a heavy toll on migration. Accepting that other species will pay the price for our convenience remains the status quo. But I'm not sure how many people are willing to pay attention to this.

Having the time to spend paying attention to something which many people do not believe they have the resources to devote to is a luxury, and one for which I am grateful. However, we can all “unplug” for even a few minutes a day, and in so doing, we, our children, and those beings we consider will necessarily be the better for it. Gallagher argues that we are what we attend to. What we choose to devote our time and attention to shapes who we are.

Maybe that's why birders are usually such nice people.

A Geologist's Perspective on the Mining Bill

Marcia Bjornerud, Lawrence University geology professor and Sierra Club member, has been paying attention to the proposed Gogebic Taconite mine in northern Wisconsin, and the special legislation that is being pushed through the Wisconsin state legislature that would weaken our environmental regulations and benefit a private mining company. The legislation was written in secret meetings, by secret authors, and is being forced into law too quickly. There have been very few public meetings for the public to discuss the merits of the bills.

The Wisconsin League of Conservation Voters organized a "special" Conservation Lobby Day on October 19 devoted entirely to this mine and proposed changes to regulations. On December 14 a public hearing was held at State Fair Park in the Milwaukee area. Marcia Bjornerud, Diana Lawrence, Nancy Graham, and Dan Mitchell traveled to the hearing, hoping to make public comments. Unable to make comments, Marcia followed up by writing a letter to Penny Bernard Schaber, her State Assembly representative from Appleton. Penny served on the committee doing the public hearing. Marcia also wrote a letter to the Appleton Post-Crescent that was published December 29. (see back page)

An edited version of her excellent letter to Penny follows. Let this serve as an example to encourage our members to contact our state representatives and our newspapers.

Hi Penny,

Your questions at yesterday's hearing were excellent and incisive, spotlighting the most critical aspects of the mining bill.

If I had had the chance to speak, here are the points I would have made. I hope that these might be useful to you if the committee has the opportunity to revise the bill. I am happy to have these comments be part of the public record if that is appropriate.

My credentials in brief: I am a "hard rock" geologist with a PhD (1987) in Structural Geology and Rock Mechanics from UW-Madison. As a professor of geology, part of my job is to prepare students for potential jobs in the mining industry. I have studied the geology of the Lake Superior region since I was in graduate school (more than 25 years) and have had an ongoing research project in the Penokee range for the past 10 years. It is a perfect teaching laboratory for students because such a variety of rock types can be seen in a small area. Last spring, together with a colleague from the US Geological Survey I led a group of 60 geologists on a field trip just west of Mellen, WI as part of the annual Institute of Lake Superior Geology. Two of my most recently published papers have been about the geology of the Penokee range.

I also served as an expert witness for the National Wildlife Federation and the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community in a 2008 contested case hearing in Michigan regarding the Kennecott/Rio Tinto Eagle Rock sulfide mine northwest of Marquette, MI (see item 5 below)

1) As a scientist, I just don't understand the idea that a permit application could be judged complete or not if the quality of the data cannot be considered. If the data are of poor quality, then the application is not complete! Just having forms filled out does not mean that a substantive application has been submitted. (This reminds me of students who think that submitting a 10-page paper full of a lot of meaningless fluff deserves a good grade!)

2) Like others at the hearing, I am very concerned about the 360 day limit for preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR). This would almost certainly undermine the scientific integrity and quality of the permit review.

First, it should be obvious that what constitutes a reasonable time limit will depend on the scope and complexity of a proposed project. Many types of data collection required in the preparation of an EIS, especially hydrologic data, are seasonally dependent. You need at least one full year to understand the full working of the system through the seasons. Other types of geologic data can't be collected because of winter snow cover or spring high water conditions. It seems very dangerous (and, as former DNR Secretary George Meyer pointed out, ultimately inefficient) to lock ourselves into a prescriptive, foreshortened time line.

Second, the presumptive approval provision really scares me, even if in practice the DNR would simply deny the permit if they ran out of time. It could actually create a perverse incentive for companies to submit poorly written and shoddily prepared permit applications because these will necessarily take longer to review, and would eat into the DNR's 360 day time limit! I could imagine the DNR getting swamped with permit applications and running out of time to thoroughly review any of them. I think it is extremely important to bear in mind that this bill is not only about the proposed Gogebic Taconite (GTAC) mine; it would be the law that applies to all future mine permit applications.

3) As someone who has spent lots of time in the woods near the proposed mine, I can attest that the area is extremely complex hydrologically, with interconnected streams, ponds, lakes, wetlands and springs. A good metaphor for understanding hydrologic (surface and groundwater) systems is that each component is like an organ in the body; you don't want to injure or extract an organ without first un-

derstanding its function! The suggestion that destroying a wetland in one place can be compensated for by creating one in another part of the state is like thinking you can save someone who lost a kidney by giving an extra kidney to someone else!

4) There ARE sulfide minerals (mainly pyrite) in the 'overburden' rock that lies immediately above the banded iron formation (formally called the Ironwood iron formation) that is the target rock of the proposed mine. The sulfide-bearing layer is called the Tyler Formation, and it is a black shale, locally baked to a slate, that was laid down under low-oxygen (reducing) conditions, so the iron in it occurs as FeCO₃ (siderite) and FeS₂ (pyrite) rather than hematite (Fe₂O₃) or magnetite (Fe₃O₄) as in the iron ore body.

Because the rock layers dip, or tilt, steeply to the northwest, a very large volume of the Tyler Formation would have to be removed to create stable benches or terraces on the northwest wall of an open pit mine. There is no use for this material, and so it would simply be stored in tailings piles. The disseminated pyrite in the fragmented rock would over time be oxidized and interact with rain and snow leading to acid drainage.

I fully agree with your suggestion that we need a comprehensive mining law, not one that creates an artificial dichotomy between ferrous and sulfide mines!

5) Regarding the contested case hearings, these are an essential option to preserve in the technical review process for a new mine. They provide an opportunity for final scrutiny of details and allow for changes in mine design before the mine is approved. In the 2008 contested case about the Kennecott mine in the Upper Peninsula, we were able to get the mine's "crown pillar" roof structure changed because of concerns about the strength of the rock. There were other problems with that mine proposal, which we were not successful in changing, but the hearing made it clear to Kennecott that someone was looking over their shoulder.

THANK YOU for representing the people!

Marica Bjornerud
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Penny Bernard Schaber represents the Wisconsin Assembly District 57. Penny is also a Sierra Club member.

Kelly's Kitchen

Snowshoes: Traditional vs. Modern

I first got to try snowshoeing on a Sierra Club outing and ever since I've been hooked. In 2001 a group of us FVSG members were on a weekend cross-country skiing trip in Eagle River, Wisconsin. After getting my butt kicked out on the trails by people 3x my age, we came back to the resort for a filling potluck dinner. Next we rejuvenated our weary muscles in the hot tub and somehow, just before midnight, caught our second wind. Most of the people on the outing had brought snowshoes and someone had an extra pair for me to try. We strapped on our headlamps and trudged our way through the woods around the resort. I loved knowing how deep the snow was and the fact that I was able to stay atop the lofty pillows of white. There's something special, almost magical, in snowshoeing.

The snowshoes I borrowed on that Sierra Club outing were the traditional large wooden shoes with rawhide webbing and long wooden tail. Since that was all I knew, the first pair of snowshoes I bought were the same style. I now also own a pair of modern snowshoes with an aluminum frame and nylon deck. I like both styles of shoes but for different reasons.

When the snow is deep and I'm breaking trail, the wooden snowshoes are what I prefer. The larger size of the shoe keeps me higher up on the snow; in other words, I don't sink as far as I would with the aluminum shoes. One disadvantage to the size is that I have to walk a bit like a saddle-sore cowgirl so I don't step on the frame of the other shoe. If the dogs are trailing me and following too close, they also have a hard time not stepping on the shoes. Another advantage of the wooden shoes is that they are quiet. Snow not only blankets the ground but it blankets the noise. I hate to disturb that peace when I'm out enjoying nature.

The aluminum snowshoes are great for traveling down well-worn

trails. The shoes are much lighter than the wooden ones and allow a more natural gait. The teeth on the bottom of the toe pieces are also great for going up hills. The modern straps and buckles make putting on the shoes quick and easy but there is a disadvantage to the setup. I have yet to see a pair of modern shoes that don't make a lot of noise. The bindings either squeak or the vinyl deck thwacks loudly on the snow. A lot of styles also kick up snow onto your backside.

So, traditional or modern snowshoes? For me, the answer totally depends on the outing. I love each style for different reasons and I thank the Sierra Club for introducing me to the sport. Are you interested in trying snowshoeing for the first time? See the outings page for info on my upcoming snowshoe hike in February. I have an extra pair of snowshoes and I would love for you to try them.



Maureen, Sharon, Phil, Elaine & Kelly head out for a late night snowshoe hike in Eagle River.

Kelly Ramstack lives in the country near Manawa, Wisconsin with her husband and two border collies. In her free time she likes to knit, read, and try new recipes. Read more tales from the country on her blog at <http://adventureswithkelly.blogspot.com>.

Mulled Apple Cider

Warm up after a day of snowshoeing with this cozy drink.

4 whole Cinnamon Sticks
1/8 teaspoon Ground Cloves
1/8 teaspoon Allspice
Orange Peel From 1 Orange
Lemon Peel From 1 Lemon
1/2 cup Pure Maple Syrup
3 Quarts - 96 oz. Apple Juice (I like Santa Cruz Organic)
Splash of Brandy or Rum (optional for adults)

Place all ingredients except alcohol in a large saucepan. Bring to almost a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer for at least 30 minutes before serving. Ladle cider into mugs and add a splash of brandy or rum for the adults if you chose. Enjoy!



Kelly Ramstack received the "John Muir Chapter Merit Award". Shown with husband Christian and Group Chair Alan Lawrence.



Jan Moldenhauer presented John Gremmer with the "Fox Valley Sierra Group Environmental Award".

Stay up-to-date on the latest environmental news, outings, programs and events by checking out our website at <http://wisconsin.sierraclub.org/foxvalley>.

Follow FVSG on Facebook and Twitter.

- On Facebook, search for "Fox Valley Sierra Group" then become a fan.
- Find us on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/FVSierraClub>.

Mining in Northern Wisconsin

by Diana Lawrence, Conservation Chair

Wisconsin has a history with mining; just a look at the state flag and will confirm it. The current discussion over new iron ore mining is heating up on both sides. Those who seek the mine in the Penokee-Gogebic Range and encourage it say that Wisconsin has a good history with mining. Those who support it say that it will be just such a simple prospect with very little dangers. I would like to explore the history of mining in Northern Wisconsin, especially the 1800's, as what happened then could happen again soon. History has a way of repeating itself.

Native Americans first started mining copper in the Lake Superior region of Northern Wisconsin around 4,000 B.C. They took what was easy to get and left it at that. Copper in the form of jewelry and tools found its way to the Rocky Mountain range and the Gulf Coast. It was an identifiable culture and it came to have the name of The Old Copper Culture. French explorers and travelers mentioned the rich mineral deposits in their writings during the mid 1700's.

In the 1840's mining in earnest came to Northern Wisconsin. Native Americans were being forced out, the California gold rush had begun and prospectors were looking for new and relatively easy sources of iron ore. This convergence of events made Northern Wisconsin look very good for mining interests. Unlike in the southern part of the state where sustainable agriculture was dominant, Northern Wisconsin was settled by non-Indians for the express purpose of mining. By the 1850's East Coast investors looking to make quick money were the primary investors. The money did not stay in the state once the resources were extracted. Superior, Ashland and Bayfield were founded during this time period.

Soon it became apparent that it was cheaper, i.e. more profitable, to smelt the iron ore in East Coast refineries. Around the time of the Civil War interest in the area waned and investors pulled their money out and the cities in Northern Wisconsin almost fell off the map. Post Civil War interest was revived in the area and speculators went crazy as high grade iron ore was found. Investment peaked in 1886 and 1887 before the bottom fell out of the market and most small companies failed. Again, investors shifted their money into Michigan and elsewhere leaving Northern Wisconsin without decent economic activity.

The timber industry helped alleviate some of the economic pain during the late 1800's, but there too, clear cutting practices left a boom and bust situation. A fairly steady economy occurred until tourism became an important source of revenue in Northern Wisconsin.

Opponents of the mine have very good points aside from the environmental impacts. This area has seen boom and bust situations before with mining and with negative, long term impacts. The good old days of mining were not so good it seems. Today we are again faced with investors from outside the state and country; the product will still be moved out of state for refining and the final product will be removed from the United States, in all likelihood to China. The people of Northern Wisconsin will have developed lives based on a certain income level and then one day the market may crash again, as it is cyclical, and the jobs will be gone. Poof! Besides having an environmental plan in place I say they need to also have an economic plan in place for what happens when the boom is over. Much more thought should go into this project at the Penokee-Gogebic Range before any holes are dug.

Source: Wisconsin Historical Society

**Next Newsletter Deadline for submitting materials
for the April thru July Issue - March 17th.**



Explore, enjoy and protect the planet

All Creatures Great and Small



“Every good thing, great and small, needs defense”

- John Muir

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It's Our Nature

Newsletter of the Fox Valley Sierra Group of the John Muir Chapter of the Sierra Club Vol. 12 Issue 1

Mining Bill Raises Serious Concerns

Appleton Post-Crescent Letter to the Editor
12/29/11 (www.postcrescent.com)

I was among the hundreds who attended the state Assembly's Jobs, Economy and Small Business Committee hearing in Milwaukee on the proposed "ferrous mining" bill LRB2035/1, which was made public just six days earlier.

Apart from the puzzle of why the only scheduled public hearing for the bill was held hundreds of miles from where the primary stakeholders live, the most astonishing aspect of the hearing was that the simplest question about the bill — namely, who authored it — was never answered by committee chairwoman Mary Williams or any of the other Republican members of the committee, even though the question was posed several times by Democratic members and citizens who spoke at the hearing. Since none of the legislators claimed authorship of the bill, we could only conclude that it was written for them by mining interests.

As a scientist, I'm concerned about the im-

practical restrictions the bill would place on the permit review process, particularly the foreshortened time line for preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement.

This would not only undermine the scientific integrity of the review but would, ironically, make the process less efficient since, if the DNR was not able to complete the EIS by the deadline, it would be forced to deny a permit. As a geologist who has worked in the area of the proposed mine, I know that the rock overlying the ore body is a black slate that contains significant amounts of pyrite, a sulfide mineral. Large quantities of this sulfide-bearing rock would have to be removed from the open pit and would sit in tailings piles, likely leading to acid drainage. The sharp distinction between "ferrous" and "sulfide" mining that the bill suggests is thus artificial.

We need we need a scientifically sound, comprehensive mining law, not LRB2035/1.

Marcia Bjornerud,
Lawrence University geology professor,
Appleton

<http://www.postcrescent.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=201112300387>

In A First, Gas And Other Fuels Are Top US Export

From an Associated Press story published December 31, 2011:

NEW YORK (AP) — For the first time, the top export of the United States, the world's biggest gas guzzler, is — wait for it — fuel.

Measured in dollars, the nation is on pace this year to ship more gasoline, diesel, and jet fuel than any other single export. It will also be the first year in more than 60 that America has been a net exporter of these fuels.

[And lower in the story] Still, the U.S. is nowhere close to energy independence. America is still the world's largest importer of crude oil.

QUESTIONS TO PONDER:

Why are we mining fuel in dangerous ways if we are exporting it?

Why are we importing oil and exporting refined fuel?