



# NEWS RELEASE



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## **Ashland and Iron Counties vote against Iron Mining Conservation Congress Results Show Citizens Want Mining Safeguards**

**Madison:** Preliminary results from 69 of 72 Counties participating in the annual statewide Conservation Congress Spring Hearing held on April 14 demonstrate significant statewide support for mining safeguards. Overwhelming majorities supported resolutions opposing the proposed taconite mine in the Penokee Range, for repeal of 2013 Act 1 – the new iron mining law known as the Bad River Watershed Destruction Act, and to direct the DNR to establish stronger air standards for frac sand mining to protect public health. Each of these resolutions was approved by more than 2 to 1 margins across the state. The preliminary DNR tabulation of results can be using the link "2014 Citizen Resolution Results" at: <http://dnr.wi.gov/About/WCC/springhearing.html>.

The resolution opposing development of the proposed massive open pit iron mine in the Penokee Hills was approved in 27 of 30 Counties with a total vote count of 1,445 for and 685 against or 68% approval. The resolution supporting the repeal of 2013 Act 1, the enabling legislation that removed many of the state's mining protections was approved in 18 of 21 Counties with a vote count of 1,098 in favor and 553 against or 67% approval. The resolution directing the DNR to regulate cancer-causing frac sand mining dust (silica) to protect public health was approved in 21 of 23 Counties with a vote count of 1,133 in favor and 489 against or 70% approval. The three resolutions follow below on pages 2-3

Notably, Ashland and Iron County residents – home to the proposed Gogebic Taconite massive open pit iron mine proposal - strongly supported both the resolution to oppose the proposed mine and the resolution to repeal 2013 Act 1, the new iron mining law. In addition, 8 counties voted by a 70% majority (440 in favor, 188 against) to direct the DNR to update the silica sand mining study released in 2012. That study did not account for long-term and cumulative impacts from the exploding frac sand mining industry.

"Just because Ashland County residents want jobs, that doesn't mean we're willing to give up our clean water, clean air, and quality of life. The state has not properly engaged the residents of Northern Wisconsin to find out what we want," said Michelle Heglund, who introduced for the resolution in Ashland County.

"I think of Wisconsin as a conservation state, with a proud history of doing the right things to conserve its land, its water and its beauty. So when I look for the balance on one side I see an out of state mining corporation with enough money to write laws in this state, offering a few jobs for 40 years with a ton of pollution. On the other side I see pristine wild land with clear clean water feeding into the largest and cleanliest of the Great Lakes. A land that has sustained the Chippewa people for thousands of years. I agree with many in Wisconsin," read Cherie Barnes, a retired truck driver, as she introduced the resolution in Rock County.

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“I thought it was critical for the Conservation Congress and Natural Resources Board to hear the call from local residents to protect us from the rampant frac-sand mining that has overtaken the region.” said Carol Johnson, who introduced the resolution in St. Croix County, “As the Wisconsin state legislature has considered removing the ability for local communities to protect their residents, it’s critical a statewide standard is enacted to protect us.”

“The people have spoken and the results demonstrate overwhelming opposition to open pit iron mining and support for public health protections for sand mining. Support for repealing Gogebic Taconite’s iron mining law is strong and growing. The Department of Natural Resources and the Wisconsin State Legislature should heed these results and work to meet the public’s expectation that our natural resources and public health will be protected” said Dave Blouin, State Mining Chair, Sierra Club. Madison Action for Mining Alternatives (MAMA), the Wisconsin Network for Peace and Justice and the Sierra Club-John Muir Chapter worked together to develop the resolutions for introduction by concerned residents at the April 14 hearings.

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*Founded in 1892 by John Muir, the Sierra Club is America’s oldest, largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization. The Sierra Club’s mission is to explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth; to practice and promote the responsible use of the earth’s ecosystems and resources; to educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment; and to use all lawful means to carry out those objectives. The Sierra Club – John Muir Chapter is made up of 15,000 members and supporters working to promote clean energy and protect water resources in Wisconsin.*

*Madison Action for Mining Alternatives is a grassroots group of citizens that provides support and solidarity to communities fighting to save water, air, ecosystems, and sustainable economies from proposed or existing mining projects in Wisconsin.*

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#### **RESOLUTIONS PRESENTED AT CONSERVATION CONGRESS HEARINGS:**

**RESOLUTION to Oppose the Proposed Open-Pit Iron Mine:** Article IX, Section 1 of the Wisconsin State Constitution, also known as the Public Trust Doctrine, states that navigable waters “shall be common highways and forever free,” and courts have established that limited encroachments upon these waters may only be permitted if they serve the public interest. Gogebic Taconite seeks to develop an open-pit iron mine in Ashland and Iron Counties covering over 3,000 acres with 900 million tons of wastes and pits up to 1,000 feet deep. This project would have massive air and water impacts on the Bad River Watershed, including over 1,000 acres of on-site wetlands, the high-value wetlands of Bad/Kakagon Sloughs, over 75 miles of designated Outstanding and Exceptional Resource Waters, and the aquifer that supplies well water to homes and businesses in the area. Mine supporters have not accounted for jobs lost due to reduction of forest crop land, impacts to local agriculture, reduction in tourism, or increasing mechanization of the mining industry, and the company has actively sought to avoid paying taxes and surcharges that might benefit local communities. **Be it RESOLVED, that the Wisconsin Conservation Congress finds the Gogebic Taconite mining project does not serve the public interest, as required by the Constitution; that the Congress opposes the proposed Gogebic Taconite mine; and that the Congress hereby directs the Department of Natural Resources to deny any permits to Gogebic Taconite related to their proposed iron mine in the Penokee Hills.**

**RESOLUTION to repeal the Iron Mining Law:** 2013 Act 1, written on behalf of Gogebic Taconite, enacted broad changes to state mining laws to enable the largest open pit mine in Wisconsin history in the environmentally and culturally sensitive Bad River Watershed of Lake Superior. The mine would be up to 1000 feet deep and larger than one square mile in area, permanently affecting groundwater, wetlands, lakes and streams, and producing more than 900 million tons of acid-leaching wastes. The Bad River Watershed includes 66 lakes, streams and rivers that are Exceptional and Outstanding Resource Waters. The mine site includes multiple designated trout streams, and the DNR has identified the Penokee Range as an area of high conservation importance. Downstream are the Kakagon-Bad River Sloughs, a National Natural Landmark and Wetland of International Importance comprising 40% of the coastal wetlands of Lake Superior. The new mining law has caused loss of cooperation between the Wisconsin DNR and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers on environmental review, has severely damaged the relationship between the State and Wisconsin's Indian Tribes by impacting treaty protected resources without adequate consultation, and may result in further erosion of cooperation between State, Federal, and Tribal regulators. **Be it RESOLVED, that the Conservation Congress supports repeal of 2013 Act 1 because it unnecessarily reduced environmental protections and citizen input related to iron mining, and requests that the Wisconsin Natural Resources Board make a similar finding and work with the Legislature to repeal the law.**

**RESOLUTION to address air standards for respirable silica dust:** Frac sand mining has exploded in Wisconsin over the past few years. Half of Wisconsin has sandstone formations and over 100 silica mining and processing operations are permitted or in stages of permitting. Wisconsin's beautiful sand counties are disappearing. Citizens are concerned about dangerous air pollutants caused by mining, crushing, processing and transport of silica throughout the state in areas of close proximity to heavy industrial operations. Fugitive dust caused by the industry is extensive. Airborne silica dust is carcinogenic. Because silicosis and related diseases take 10-20 years to develop based upon exposure, it is crucial to public health to establish a regulatory standard for respirable crystalline silica dust and require that the industry provide continuous monitoring. Towns, counties, or municipalities lack the capacity to measure and regulate particulates. The DNR lacks an acceptable standard that can be monitored and enforced. **BE IT RESOLVED that the Wisconsin Conservation Congress directs the Wisconsin Natural Resources Board to establish a regulatory emission standard for respirable crystalline silica dust of an annual average of less than 3 micrograms per cubic meter; require mandatory monitoring of PM10, PM2.5, and PM4 dust at frac sand sites to ensure compliance with US EPA National Ambient Air Quality Standards and the 3 µg/m3 standard; conduct regular inspection of facilities and locations where fugitive dust is generated; take immediate enforcement action for violations; and work to educate the public about the health dangers inherent in the industry.**