

Paul Danicic: An acid test for sulfide mines

Why do they oppose a bill that would protect the lake country but would not prevent their operation?

By **PAUL DANICIC**

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Legislation introduced recently by state Rep. Alice Hausman and state Sen. Jim Carlson would go a long way toward ensuring that Minnesota doesn't suffer the same fate that other states have from sulfide mining.

Although many people would like to simply ban sulfide mining here, as our neighbors in Wisconsin did in 1997, this bill does not do that. It is only a ban on pollution.

The bill mandates that companies mine safely and don't gamble our clean water with techniques that require perpetual wastewater treatment. It guarantees that companies will put up enough money to cover cleanup costs.

Mining companies that oppose the legislation say they will not pollute or leave taxpayers to pay for decades of cleanup. They say no additional restrictions are necessary to make sure this new form of mining won't dump sulfuric acid and toxic metals into the lakes, rivers, streams and groundwater of Minnesota's lake country. But their proposals call for decades of expensive water treatment after they're finished, rather than doing it right in the first place and not leaving behind such a mess.

They say we don't need to worry about acid mine drainage because the ore here is low in the sulfides that create such pollution. Yet South Dakota's Gilt Edge Mine had low-sulfide rock similar to Minnesota's. Only 15 years ago, it created acid mine drainage that wiped out the fish in a nearby creek.

Industry lobbyists say the legislation would obstruct iron mining in Minnesota. But the bill was obviously written to address the threats of sulfide mining and sulfide mining only, while ensuring it didn't affect any other industries or forms of mining

The mining companies boast of staffs of native Iron Rangers with work histories in our taconite facilities, but I'm still waiting to hear that any of them have ever worked in a copper mine, which is a whole different animal. And I don't know how a multinational corporation whose board of directors sits in Vancouver, and which boasts major investors from around the globe, can tell the taxpayers of this state to mind their own business and let them have their way with our treasured lakes.

Other states have suffered because their leaders saw dollar signs when they should have seen question marks. Leaders believed promises that the mines wouldn't pollute, but ignored all the times those promises had been broken.

With inadequate laws on the books and sulfide mining proposals looming on the horizon, now is the time for Minnesotans to protect themselves from the problems that have accompanied this form of mining elsewhere. This legislation would be an important step toward such protection without banning sulfide mining in our state.

Mining companies say they won't pollute our water or leave us taxpayers holding the bag. But it's hard to believe them when they vehemently oppose a bill that would make sure they don't.

Paul Danicic is director of Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness.