



NEWS RELEASE

Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources
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DATE: March 9, 2012

Guest Column by DNR Secretary Cathy Stepp

Don't Buy the Hyperbole - WI DNR Could Have Sited An Iron Mine While Protecting the Environment

As the debate on the mining bill raged, we all heard the hyper political language about the environmental harm that would result from any iron ore mine. It was very difficult for me to sit back and watch. I was ever hopeful that calmer heads would prevail considering the \$1.5 billion investment and the thousands of resulting jobs that the state could have welcomed while the environment is protected.

Unfortunately, I was wrong. This issue became just another political piñata with some Senators clearly displaying that politics is more important than getting things done for Wisconsin citizens. I wish it wasn't true, but unfortunately in the end the motivation to not allow a potential success for Governor Walker appears to be what really killed the bill.

The debate even degenerated with some suggesting that the DNR lacked the expertise to site a mine. I think it is time to set the record straight and to recommend that we need to have a higher dialogue on environmental issues if we expect to move forward as a state. The days of scare tactics should be over. We can have disagreements and debates. There are legitimate differences in opinion on the environment and lots of other issues. Can't we have these discussions without the fear-mongering?

As for the particulars of the mining bill, the amendments made by the Joint Finance Committee were all positive amendments that provided the DNR even more tools to successfully site a potential iron ore mine. Many of the amendments had fingerprints from the bill proposed by Senators Schultz and Jauch. The end bill was a result of lots of reasonable compromises. Unfortunately, Senators Schultz, Jauch and other Senate Democrats were not willing to compromise. It was their way or the highway. As we saw, Gogebic took that highway out of the state unfortunately.

Lets face the facts. Mining is one of the most regulated, if not the most regulated, industries in the world. This mining proposal would have had to garner DNR approval, Army Corps of Engineers Approval, EPA approval, US Fish & Wildlife Service approval and to meet the water quality and quantity standards established downstream on the Bad River Indian Reservation. With all of these approvals, do we really buy into the "pollution-goes-wild" fear mongering. How can mines be sited in Michigan and Minnesota? Are we incapable of learning from their successes and their shortcomings?

It is also a fact, that a mine would change the landscape. This is not in dispute. The bill before the Legislature recognizes this fact. The bill does not change any of the off-site environmental protections. It does however recognize that the ore-body is located where it is. As a result, some flexibility is needed to change the landscape to get at the ore deposit. Recognizing this fact, this bill required that the mining company avoid and minimize impacts to wetlands and navigable waters. If such impacts could not be avoided, mitigation at a rate of 1.5 acres to 1 acre was required. It is important to note that under current mining law, no such mitigation is required. I believe this is an improvement to current mining law -- don't you?

As you know, such flexibility leads to lots of speculation about what could occur. It is easy to play those kinds of games. However, this is not a game. In the end, don't we trust the regulating agencies to do their job? On my travels through-out the state, I have found that most of the citizens of the state trust the DNR to do its job. Why don't Democrat State Senators?

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