



WaterLegacy's Mission

WaterLegacy's mission is to protect Minnesota's water resources and the communities who rely on them. We focus on preventing toxic industrial pollution from the PolyMet/Glencore copper-nickel sulfide mine, protecting human health and treaty resources, and defending Minnesota water quality standards from industry rollbacks. We hold Minnesota state agencies accountable to enforce pollution standards and to operate according to law, science and public transparency.

WaterLegacy collaborates with indigenous tribes, environmental groups, health professionals, scientists, artists, and those who fish, hunt, gather wild rice and live near areas potentially affected by mining projects. Our Board of Directors are concerned citizens, most of whom grew up or live in Northeastern Minnesota. WaterLegacy's Advocacy Director and Counsel, Paula Maccabee, is an attorney with 39 years of public interest advocacy experience and has been working on this issue for more than 10 years. WaterLegacy also has dedicated communications and engagement staff and many passionate volunteers.



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Why We Care: PolyMet Threatens Minnesota Waters



Minnesota is in danger. The PolyMet project's waste rock and tailings would seep pollution into wetlands and streams for hundreds of years, contaminate drinking water with toxic metals, increase mercury contamination of fish, and decimate wild rice. **These impacts would impair children's health and disproportionately harm Native and low-income people who rely on fish and wild rice for subsistence.**

The PolyMet project would also directly destroy more than 900 acres of wetlands and indirectly impact thousands of additional acres of wetlands and forest habitat. It would create adverse impacts as far downstream as the St. Louis River Estuary, where the St. Louis River meets Lake Superior.

PolyMet received state and federal permits required to mine. WaterLegacy is challenging these permits in court, demonstrating violations of state and federal clean water laws to protect clean water and public lands, procedural irregularities, and irresponsible financial assurances, among other issues. WaterLegacy also educates citizens about threats posed by sulfide mining and advocates for preserving and enforcing water quality standards threatened by special-interest lobbyists. We seek to hold government agencies accountable to citizens and the public interest, and support efforts by the Lake Superior Chippewa/Ojibwe to protect treaty resources, culture, health and clean water.

Selected WaterLegacy Accomplishments

- WaterLegacy and allies prevailed on January 13th, 2020 when the Minnesota Court of Appeals overturned DNR permits for the PolyMet mine. We are now opposing PolyMet and DNR efforts to overturn this victory. If the court decision stands, the PolyMet mine cannot go forward unless the project receives new DNR permits after a contested case hearing.
- WaterLegacy exposed evidence of procedural irregularities regarding PolyMet's water pollution permit (NPDES permit), resulting in Court of Appeals orders requiring a district court investigation of Minnesota Pollution Control Agency's permitting procedures and suspension of the permit until that process is completed.
- WaterLegacy intervened in the lawsuit filed by the mining industry to block enforcement of the sulfate pollution standard that protects natural wild rice. We won our case and preserved the wild rice sulfate standard in district court and at the Minnesota Court of Appeals.
- WaterLegacy worked with tribal allies to successfully uphold the wild rice sulfate standard in rulemaking and organized citizens to secure two vetoes by Governor Dayton of bills proposing to repeal the wild rice sulfate standard.
- During environmental review of PolyMet's mine plan, WaterLegacy and our allies broke all records for citizen engagement: 58,000 public comments were submitted on the draft mine plan and another 30,000 comments on the final mine plan.

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