



OPINION

PolyMet land exchange: Right or wrong? Wrong: Even the appraisal cheats the public

As a lifelong resident of Northeastern Minnesota and a successful small business owner for more than 30 years, I find a lot to dislike in Congressman Rick Nolan's federal bill proposing to force a land exchange between the Superior National Fores...

Written By: Bill Hansen | Jul 18th 2017 - 12am.



Denfeld's 1947 boys basketball team is the only Denfeld basketball team to win a state title. The team's head coach was Lloyd Holm. Team members were Rudy Monson, Larry Tessier, Paul Nace, Kenneth Sunnarborg, Eugene Norlander, Howard Tucker, Tony Skull, Jerry Walczak, Bruce Budge, Keith Stolen and student manager Bob Scott.

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As a lifelong resident of Northeastern Minnesota and a successful small business owner for more than 30 years, I find a lot to dislike in Congressman Rick Nolan's federal bill proposing to force a land exchange between the Superior National Forest and PolyMet Mining (Our View: "A lot to like in land swap," July 12).



Bill Hansen

First, there is the copper-nickel mine that is the reason for the land swap. Let's set the environmental considerations aside for the moment. Copper-nickel mining is still a bad choice for economic development. Recent advances in mining automation drastically would reduce the number of workers needed to mine before PolyMet even got started. Copper-nickel mining never increases the overall number of jobs in a region; and when the mines close down, nearby communities suffer permanent economic depression.

Even if this proposed land exchange was for a good cause, Nolan's effort to deny the public due process is a bad idea. The PolyMet land exchange would swap 6,650 acres of the Superior National Forest in the headwaters of the St. Louis River for private lands based on a low-ball appraisal of \$550 per acre. Private landowners in Aitkin County recently received an average of \$3,885 per acre from the Kennecott Mining Company for surface lands above copper-nickel minerals. Why should PolyMet's wealthy foreign

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investors get a sweetheart price from the U.S. Forest Service? PolyMet's special treatment could result in a loss to taxpayers of millions of dollars.

- [Read the other side of the discussion here](#)

I think we all can agree our national forests shouldn't be given to wealthy foreign investors without, at the very least, fair compensation in return. As state Sen. Erik Simonson of Duluth asked in a tweet, "Since when does our government work for foreign corporations?"

PolyMet and its political supporters have told us not to worry about their copper-nickel mine because PolyMet will follow federal and state laws that protect taxpayers and our clean water. This is their first test, and it is not a good sign. Clearly, PolyMet fears recent lawsuits challenging the low valuation of the public lands have merit. Otherwise, why the end run around due process with a special favor from Congress? PolyMet may say it wants to "do it right," but it looks like it's only willing to follow the rules if things are going its way.

If PolyMet can wiggle out of paying a fair price for the public land it needs, who is to say its wealthy foreign investors won't demand political favors when clean water, human health, and environmental protection from copper-nickel mining are more directly at stake?

We deserve better.

Regardless of whether we support or oppose copper-nickel mining, we all should be united in telling mega-rich foreign mining companies to follow the rules. If we don't stand up now, we not only miss the chance to get a fair deal on our public lands, we risk Minnesota's most valuable economic asset: the two largest unspoiled freshwater sources in the world.

Bill Hansen of Tofte was the longtime owner of Sawbill Canoe Outfitters at the end of the Sawbill Trail, where he still works.