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## Pro-, anti-mine forces focus on Flambeau

By JOHN PEPIN, Journal Staff Writer

MARQUETTE — Efforts to return a Wisconsin open pit copper mine to a condition suitable for wildlife habitat and passive recreation are having an impact in the central Upper Peninsula.

An agreement reached last week between the Flambeau Mining Company and several groups, including the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, states 149 of the former mine's 181 acres have successfully been reclaimed.

An \$11 million security bond the mining company was required to post to the state will now be reduced to \$2 million, which will remain in place for another 20 years.

A stipulation in the pact requires that another 32 acres now being used for business and recreation continue to be monitored for the next five years to ensure no damage occurs to surface water, soil, sediments and biota, according to the agreement. A completion certificate on that section of the project may not be requested for at least three years.

Mining opposition groups said they requested the additional monitoring in an effort to clarify the source of elevated levels of copper found in runoff from the "industrial outlot" portion of the site.

The regulatory agreement is important to upper Michigan because those for and against a proposed Kennecott Eagle Minerals Company mine in

northern Marquette County are pointing to the Flambeau Mine as an example of success or failure.

Kennecott is the Flambeau Mining Company's parent company. Company officials said receiving the certificate of completion for the majority of the Flambeau project lands shows a success story.

"We believe that Flambeau is still an excellent example of how a mine can be done appropriately, both for the environment and for the community," said Jon Cherry, project manager of Kennecott's Eagle Project on the Yellow Dog Plains in Marquette County.

The Flambeau Mine opened in 1993 and produced copper, gold and silver until 1997. The mining company said 181,000 tons valued at more than \$500 million was mined. The state of Wisconsin made about \$14 million in mining taxes from the project.

Kennecott's Eagle Project Mine proposes to produce nickel, copper, and other metals from a small but rich metal sulfide deposit located about 25 miles northwest of Marquette. That project would be an underground mine.

Groups involved in the stipulation talks included the Flambeau Mining Company, Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, the Sierra Club, Northern Thunder, Lac Courte Oreilles Band of the Lake Superior Chippewa Indians, Rusk County Citizens Action Group, and the Wisconsin Resources Protection Council. The parties have until June 13 to ratify the agreement.

"We have done a great deal of monitoring over the years, both voluntarily as well as what was required by the state," said Jana Murphy, Flambeau Mining Company manager of environment and reclamation services. "Past monitoring shows that we did a good job of protecting the environment throughout the construction, mining and reclamation of the site, and we are confident additional monitoring will continue to show results that we are protecting the Flambeau River."

Michelle Halley, an attorney for the National Wildlife Federation, disagrees. She said for years, wetlands and streams that feed the Flambeau River have suffered high levels of copper contamination from mine facilities.

“Despite Kennecott’s numerous attempts to clean up the source, it continues to pollute,” Halley said.

Halley cites the company’s withdrawing its certification request for the industrial area at Flambeau was done because that acreage was “so contaminated.”

“This is a clear acknowledgement by Kennecott that problems remain at the Flambeau Mine and that additional monitoring and reclamation work is needed,” Halley said. “They have publicly admitted through their actions that the Flambeau Mine is polluting. Kennecott has broken its promise to Wisconsin’s citizens not to pollute.”

Mining company officials said they agreed to additional monitoring in an effort to recognize local opposition groups had concerns.

Cynthia Pryor, executive director of the Yellow Dog Watershed Preserve, said the agreement was “an important step in the right direction” for Wisconsin to “agree that there are, and continue to be, contamination issues at the Kennecott Flambeau mine site.”

“Kennecott must remediate a site that has polluted both the surface and surface waters with heavy metals discharge in the recent years. Kennecott will have to expand their monitoring of the surface of the old mine site to ensure there are not other areas with problems,” Pryor said. “For us in Michigan, this is good news. Kennecott has flaunted the Flambeau Mine as their model of a good sulfide mine, now we have hard proof that it is not.”

An independent opinion is being sought by the Michigan DEQ on the ceiling design for Kennecott’s Eagle project. Once that report is received,

the DEQ is expected to issue a preliminary decision on whether to approve the company’s permit applications.

A series of public hearings would then be held on the preliminary decision before the DEQ would make a final ruling on the mine.