



December 7, 2015

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Ms. Fay, Ms. Cameron and Ms. Atkinson:

This letter pertains to NorthMet Mining and Land Exchange Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) officially published in the *Federal Register* on November 13, 2015. We ask that the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources (MDNR), U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) extend the public input period for comments on the NorthMet Mining and Land Exchange Final Environmental Impact Statement. The public input period is currently scheduled to expire on December 14, 2015.

For meaningful analysis of the adequacy of the FEIS to be completed and public feedback to be submitted, members of the public and citizen organizations need more than the 30 days allotted. As you know, the Final EIS is comprised of over 3000 pages, many of them containing highly technical information. Additionally, there are thousands of pages of supporting material underlying the document. These supporting materials are instrumental in understanding the content of the FEIS, particularly to understand the co-lead's responses to SDEIS comments. Appendix A repeatedly refers readers to data packages referenced in the FEIS.

The comment period for the NorthMet Supplement Draft EIS in 2013-2014 was 90 days, with three public availability sessions across the state of Minnesota. Based on the 58,000 comments received, changes were made to the FEIS and the NorthMet proposal that require sufficient time for additional analysis. Thirty days of time with no public hearings provides

neither sufficient time nor the opportunity for members of the public to directly address questions to regulators.

The publication of an errata sheet by the co-lead agencies on November 24, 2015 also argues in favor of a reasonable extension. While the errata notice on the MDNR website states that “The corrections are routine and minor in nature. They relate to references in the Final EIS and do not alter the analysis presented in the Final EIS in any way,” one of the documents included in the errata notice that was left off the master reference list in the FEIS is of particular interest. One new area discussed in the FEIS from the SDEIS relates to the possibility of northward flow from the NorthMet project after closure. The document added to the master reference list and supplied in the errata notice is cited as *Barr Engineering. Technical Memorandum: Response to Cooperating Agency Comments Related to Peter Mitchell Pit – Version 4. From Tina Pint and Jere Mohr to Bill Johnson, MDNR. September 14, 2015.* This document underlies the co-leads’ discussion of this new information and potential mitigation strategies for northward flow. Sufficient time for review of this discussion and expert response to it is critical, given that this information is newly provided in the FEIS and that the key document underlying the response of the co-leads was not provided until ten days into a thirty day comment period.

Members of the public are also disadvantaged by the period of time chosen for the public input period. The 30 day period includes the holiday season, and as such professionals and members of the public are unavailable as cultural celebrations are honored.

The public has a right to know whether the EIS has truly addressed their concerns and comments on the NorthMet SDEIS, and represents a project that merits support. This is not possible given the time constraints that you have imposed. At least 60 days is required to even review all the material, let alone write a comment in response. However, at a minimum, we ask that the co-leads accept public comments on the FEIS until January 4, the same deadline as the USFS deadline for objections. This extended time period is consistent with a federal Co-Lead agency and is unlikely to cause any delay, given that the extension is over the holidays.

Sincerely,



Steve Morse, Executive Director
Minnesota Environmental Partnership

Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness

Friends of the Cloquet Valley State Forest

Minnesota Center for Environmental Advocacy

Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness

Protect Our Manoomin*

Save Our Sky Blue Waters

Save Lake Superior Association

Sierra Club North Star Chapter

Voyageurs National Park Association

Wilderness Watch*

* Indicates organizations not members of Minnesota Environmental Partnership

Cc: Governor Mark Dayton and Lt. Gov. Tina Smith
MDNR Commissioner Tom Landwehr
Superior National Forest Supervisor Brenda Halter