

A Woman's Perspective on the PolyMet DEIS (draft environmental impact statement)

I've spent my life on the Iron Range, caught in its mix of ethnic cultures, blue collar hard-working ethics, and rural small town living. The summer after I retired from teaching, I attended the scoping hearing for PolyMet, Inc. , a proposed Canadian copper nickel mine near Hoyt Lakes. I came home with a 200 page scoping document and an emerging awareness of how the landscape of the Iron Range is a by-product of a century of mining.

The thought of turning the Arrowhead Region of Minnesota into a sulfide mining district jarred open my heart, along with my mind. The reasons to oppose mining of any kind are varied. Mining destroys the land, changes the landscape by creating mountains of waste rock, pollutes waterways, and generates a boom/bust type of economy. Mining does this, whether it's in my backyard—or yours.

After four years of reading through technical documents regarding the PolyMet mine, my mind rebels. There is no way to prove whether PolyMet will or will not pollute our environment. The figures come from Barr Engineering, and the fact of the matter is that none of us have access to Barr Engineering's software. There is no way to prove that any kind of computer modeling will hold up in the real environment.

The entire PolyMet draft environmental impact statement is based upon technology and a trust in technology. My female mind rebels. It rebels at the thought of blasting and crushing tons of rock to extract pounds, or even ounces, of metals. It rebels at the whole size and scope of the project—at the thought of acid mine drainage contaminating our water for generations to come—into perpetuity.

My female mind asks, how will women benefit from this mining project? How many women would actually work in this kind of mine, or receive associated living wages? How many women would instead be given minimum wage spin-off jobs—in restaurants, fast-food chains, gas stations, grocery stores? Is mining helping or hindering our local communities? And where exactly do the majority of mining company profits go?

When the mining economy slumps, as is happening on the Iron Range right now, and domestic abuse increases, who receives the brunt of that abuse? Women and children. When electronic equipment is sent to foreign countries for the recycling of these metals, who are assigned these toxic pennies-a-day jobs? Women and children.

Who will bear the children that will have no access to future jobs because mining has destroyed the land for other opportunities? How many of us are living here now because we value the natural setting around us? Do we value that environment enough to want to save it?

I believe it's time for women to stand up and say, "Enough." The masculine mind is creating projects of such size and scope that we are on the road to self-destruction. There is even talk of mining the moon. Where will the resources come from to fuel this?

The mining companies say we need these metals to maintain our lifestyles. The truth is that the low-grade, semi-processed metals of the Arrowhead region would be sent to Ontario for final smelting. Through PolyMet's agreement with Glencore, these metals would then be sold on the world market. The U.S. would be competing with China to buy our own precious metals back.

In global terms, my female mind does not allow me to acquiesce in a consumer lifestyle based on extravagance and waste. Who buys the large trucks, boats, and recreational vehicles that demand their share of these metals? I would say it's the men, while the women and children go along for the ride. Can we justify this kind of lifestyle when there are men, women, and children in some countries without access to such basics as running water or sanitary facilities?

In the U. S. economy, large appliances are currently designed to last for an average of seven years. How does planned obsolescence of stoves, refrigerators, and washing machines affect women, children, and household budgets? Who benefits most from this kind of economy? Does it make sense to use finite resources and dwindling energy supplies in such an inefficient way?

Likewise, do we really need a flat screen TV in every room (and vehicle)? Do we really want the TV media raising our children? Do computers make our lives easier or more complicated, and how healthy is it to spend hours in front of a TV or computer? Will hybrid or electric cars reduce traffic jams and accidents? Do we need to live in mega-houses and then hire other women at minimum wage to clean them?

My female mind rebels when government and industry rush to create a renewable future that is based on using nonrenewable metals such as copper, nickel, and platinum. Electric car batteries use lithium, one of the rarest metals on earth. We are simply exchanging an economy based on oil and coal for one based on the mining of expensive rare and low grade metals.

The PolyMet mining proposal would not survive scrutiny from logic that takes into account the amount of energy and resources required to mine over 99% waste. Women's thinking does not allow charts, graphs, maps, and polygons representing waste rock piles to replace the real impacts that mining has on the environment. Women's thinking does not accept statistics that in turn allow our water to be polluted to some minimal level. Those statistics, when taken in combination rather than individually, mean that our drinking water may not be safe for our children's bodies.

Women's thinking is not inferior to men's—instead it provides an alternate view that is needed to bring balance to decision making. Often when women enter the competitive corporate or political world, they succumb to the group thinking that surrounds them. Women thus lose their feminine perspective. By

the same token, when men balance analytical thinking with the holistic side of reasoning, focused creative solutions are the result. With the huge problems facing our society today, including a shifting economy and global warming, the male-female balance is imperative.

It's time for women to make our voices heard, to demand transparency and honesty from our agencies, and to ban lobbyists of polluting industries from polluting our minds. Even polluters must share in any future that their pollution creates. Now is the time to say, "Enough." We need to stop and think about how short term decisions are affecting the long term future.

The PolyMet project needs to be put back into its box so that we can close the lid on its Pandora's list of problems. The Arrowhead region of northeast Minnesota exemplifies the balance of nature that we need to maintain—for ourselves in a changing world, for the children of the future.

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Minnesota's TOUGH ENVIRONMENTAL LAWS in action on the Iron Range- 2009 photo



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