



## **Tamarack Water Alliance Community Zoom Meeting Wednesday, January 8, 2025 10am CT**

Everyone is invited to attend our open community virtual Zoom meeting **Wednesday, January 8, 2025 at 7pm. Topic: The Campaign To Protect The Penokees with Nick Vander Puy Storyteller/Author of *Water Protectors: the H.E.L.P. Campaign to Save the Penokees.***

Drawn from firsthand, independent reporting, Nick Vander Puy's book presents the story of how a coalition of tribal citizens, environmentalists and neighbors, known as the Harvest Education Learning Project, founded the H.E.L.P. Camp and occupied treaty protected lands in the Penokee Hills of northern Wisconsin during the coldest winter of the past century, 2013-2014. Their act of civil disobedience successfully halted a multinational mineral corporation's plan for mountaintop removal mining in the Lake Superior watershed, a project that would have caused catastrophic environmental damage to Lake Superior and dire cultural consequences for the adjacent Indigenous communities. In the years since, the H.E.L.P. camp's work has continued to serve as a powerful inspiration in the region for grassroots activism and community resistance to environmental, economic and cultural exploitation.

**Register for the meeting and receive the Zoom link [here](https://tamarackwateralliance.org/php/eventreg.php?eid=16)**  
(<https://tamarackwateralliance.org/php/eventreg.php?eid=16>)

**Download Tamarack Water Alliance fact sheets/flyers [here](https://tamarackwateralliance.org/resources.html#flyers)**  
(<https://tamarackwateralliance.org/resources.html#flyers>)

**DONATE to Tamarack Water Alliance:** Tamarack Water Alliance is a Minnesota non-profit. We are not certified as a federal non-profit (e.g. 501c3). Our current focus is providing education about the risks of sulfide mining, narratives to counter the greenwashing and divisiveness that some mining companies promote, as well as forging connections to other communities concerned about sulfide mines in Minnesota, across the Midwest, and around the world.

Your donation goes to support our community educational activities which include tabling at community festivals and parades, participation in other community events, targeted speaking engagements with interested local organizations, monthly informational public Zoom calls and an associated email newsletter, website and social media, letter writing campaigns and articles in local news outlets, interviews with media, and other community outreach and canvassing.

**Sign-Up To Receive Updates from the DNR** on Talon Metals Environmental Impact Statement here [here](https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/input/environmentalreview/tamarack-nickel-project.html) (<https://www.dnr.state.mn.us/input/environmentalreview/tamarack-nickel-project.html>)

If you believe nickel-sulfide mining is too risky in Aitkin County, Tamarack Water Alliance has yard signs with this messaging available. Your \$6 donation helps defray costs. Email [waters@tamarackwateralliance.org](mailto:waters@tamarackwateralliance.org) to arrange pickup of your sign.

**Volunteer** with the Tamarack Water Alliance. Send us an [email](mailto:waters@tamarackwateralliance.org) at [waters@tamarackwateralliance.org](mailto:waters@tamarackwateralliance.org).

Encourage your friends, family and neighbors to [sign up for the monthly Tamarack Water Alliance email](http://eepurl.com/hOboEb) newsletter at <http://eepurl.com/hOboEb>.

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# Frontlines of Water Protection: The Campaign To Protect the Penokees

Nick Vander Puy, Storyteller/Author



My name is Nick Vander Puy. I'm 71 years old. I've been on the front lines with water protection in northern Wisconsin most of my adult life. Here are some actions.

1. Defeat of the Crandon Exxon, BHP/Billiton mine near the Mole Lake Sokaogon Indian community
2. Resistance to RTZ Ladysmith gold mine,
3. Bad River Ogitichidaag (warrior) blockade of acid mine shipments across the rez
4. Resistance to American Transmission Company electric line,
5. Defeat of CAFO in Bayfield County,
6. Defeat of GTAC/Cline iron ore mine in Penokees (which my book "Water Protectors: the H.E.L.P. Campaign to Save the Penokees" deals with.)

I'm going to discuss these actions along with some relevant teachings I received on the journey.

## Early Influences

I grew up in a hunting and fishing household being taught by both my father and maternal grandfather. But it wasn't just about killing animals and fish, it was also about the appreciation of nature. When I was in seventh grade my Grandpa Esser gave me a subscription to National Wildlife Magazine. He gave me a book by Milwaukee Journal Outdoor writer Mel Ellis "Wild Goose, Brother Goose" about hunting at the Horicon Marsh from the goose's perspective.

**Instructions for living a life.**

**Pay attention.**

**Be astonished.**

**Tell about it.**

— Mary Oliver

When I got to Ripon College I dove into Faulkner's "The Bear" and Hemingway's "Big, Two Hearted River"

When my grandfather died in 1973 his sisters at the funeral gave me three books, "Black Elk Speaks," "Lame Deer: Seeker of Visions," and "Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee."

After flunking out of Marquette Law School (I thought we're going to study justice) I became a hunting and fishing guide in northern Wisconsin.

## Defending Anishinaabe Treaty Rights & Fish Wars - Northern Wisconsin 1983-1990

I got involved from the get go supporting Anishinaabe treaty hunting, fishing and gathering rights during the 1983- to early 1990's Fish Wars when the landings turned into war zones. I was welcomed into the Three Fires Midewiwin Lodge by Grand Chief Eddie Benton who was a founder of the American Indian Movement (AIM) I studied his "Mishomis" book and got sober. I learned the most important Ojibwe word is "Miiigwech."

During my life I've worked mostly with Seventh Fire European/Americans under indigenous leadership to protect the earth. The fish war in the 'eighties was seen as the lighting of the Seventh Fire.

*It is this time that the light skinned race will be given a choice between two roads. One road will be green and lush, and very inviting. The other road will be black and charred, and walking it will cut their feet. In the prophecy, the people decide to take neither road, but instead to turn back, to remember and reclaim the wisdom of those who came before them. If they choose the right road, then the Seventh Fire will light the Eighth and final Fire, an eternal fire of peace, love, brotherhood and sisterhood. If the light skinned race makes the wrong choice of the roads, then the destruction which they brought with them in coming to this country will come back at them and cause much suffering and death to all the Earth's people.*

I was mentored in hunting, fishing and gathering wild rice by a Mole Lake Sokaogon Elder Joe Ackley and Lac du Flambeau elder Nick Hockings.

## **Public Radio Reporting**

I left guiding to work as a station based National Public Radio reporter, being trained at the Diversity Initiative in Washington DC. I was hired by WXPB Public Radio in Rhinelander, Wisconsin. I covered efforts to block the Ladysmith Gold mine. I saw Walt Bresette (Ojibwe) climb the fence and count coup on earth moving equipment with Blackhawk's war club. Gov. Tommy Thompson's chief of staff and former Exxon lobbyist James Klauser predicted there would be ten operating mines in Wisconsin by the year 2000. I covered Bad River Ogitichidaag (warriors) blockading Wisconsin Central railroad transporting acid for across the rez to White Pine mine on decrepit tracks. The White Pine mine soon folded. I listened to two women, Sandy Lyon and Evelyn Churchill reframe mining in terms of its awful metallic sulfide acidic by products. I covered State Representative Spencer Black lobbying the legislature to pass the Mining Moratorium bill (signed on the Wolf River by Gov. Tommy Thompson) in 1997 which made it almost impossible to permit another mine in Wisconsin.

## **Mining & Social License with Exxon & Other Companies**

When we fought Exxon and other companies 28 years to stop the Crandon mine a half mile upstream from the Mole Lake Sokaogon community wild rice lake, we relied on strategies from Dr. Al "Frodo" Gedicks about denying the company a social license to operate (SLO).

In today's world mining companies can't just rely on government permits and regulatory approvals to operate. This "license" isn't issued by any authority or written on paper. Instead, it's an informal document from the approval and trust of the communities where these companies operate. Without it mining projects can face strong resistance, protests and sometimes complete shutdown.

We brought in anglers, especially trout fishermen on the Wolf River, to help us deny Exxon a SLO to operate in our territory. Another factor which helped defeat the mine at Crandon was Mole Lake attorneys Glen Reynold's and Glenn "Mac" Stoddard successfully argued Treatment as State (TAS) status which allowed Mole Lake to exercise higher water quality standards off the rez.

Upon signing the Mining Moratorium Law, the Mining industry referred to us as "the People's Republic of Wisconsin." And by the year 2024 only one mine Ladysmith has operated in our territory. Without SLO even the most lucrative projects can be stopped.

## **Successful Shutdown of 345 Kilovolt Transmission Line**

During our early 2000 fight against American Transmission Company building a giant 345 Kilovolt transmission, slicing across northern Wisconsin, carrying energy from Pimichickimak

Cree territory in northern Manitoba, we enlisted the Father of Earth Day former Senator Gaylord Nelson to paddle a canoe down the Namekagon River with a Lac Courte Oreilles elder Buck Barber and his grandson Starman. We brought the Mole Lake drum and got statewide public TV coverage.

Sandy Lyon and I successfully lobbied the Douglas County board to shutdown the transmission line, but two weeks later Gov. Doyle pre-empted us, overriding local control.

### **Documentary *Manoominike: Wild rice, Tom Vennum Jr, Fred Ackley Jr. and the Ojibway People***

As an advocate journalist I began to chafe under the NPR editing process, believing, along with Lakota elder Milt Lee the NPR editing process destroyed the vibrations in our stories. So, I became an independent producer. Moving up to Madeline Island on Lake Superior, we faced a giant pig shit factory. We got organized under the leadership of Mary Dougherty. Our attorney Glen "Mac" Stoddard crafted a moratorium on CAFO's which passed and remains in effect.

I produced a documentary with funding from the Wisconsin Humanities Council, "*Manoominike: Wild rice, Tom Vennum Jr, Fred Ackley Jr. and the Ojibway People*" about the threats to wild rice from upstream metallic sulfide mining.

### **Successful H.E.L.P. Campaign to Save The Penokees**

Then a West Virginia coal baron Chris Cline GTAC/Cline in 2010 set his sights on digging a 1000 ft. deep hole in the lush, pure and salubrious Penokees to mine iron upstream from the Bad River rez and wild rice. (This after the 1997 Mining Moratorium law was repealed.) I was recruited by the Lac Courte Oreilles tribe along with several to occupy the Penokees in wall tents and wigwams. I wrote about this in "*Water Protectors: the H.E.L.P. Campaign to Save the Penokees.*" Which I'll read some passages from during our zoom meeting 8 January with Tamarack Water Alliance.

We received help from Trout Unlimited fishing group opposing the mine for obvious reasons. We used this same tactic with sport fisherman twenty years ago opposing the Crandon mine near the Mole Lake Sokaogon Reservation in northeastern Wisconsin.

Here's an example of how we denied GTAC/Cline a Social License (SLO) to operate in our territory. Northland College geologist Tom Fitz found grunerite on the proposed mining site in the Penokees. Grunerite (asbestos fiber) destroys miner's lungs as has happened on the Mesabi Range. Paul DeMain (Oneida) and I accompanied Fitz and a News team from Indian Country film crew to document this find. We brought this information to the Ashland County board for an open hearing. Professor Tom Fitz was backed up by Northland College President Mike Miller.

I was shocked when Ashland County chair Pete Russo threw out the three minute egg timer rule which allowed us to speak as long as necessary being respectful to our neighbors. Migawd, democracy was breaking out.

After watching our video about the grunerite in the Penokees and listening to our stories the Ashland County board voted to charge GTAC/Cline a three/quarter million-dollar security for further exploration in the Penokees.

The company balked at the payment. The price of iron ore dropped, energy costs were prohibitive, and there were far more wetlands than the company admitted. In 2015 the company left our territory. Our story continues to be an inspiration to other communities opposing the environmental damage of mining.

West Virginia coal baron Chris Cline told Barron's Magazine he'd run afoul of Indian tribes and their allies.

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### **Proposed Nickel Mine Near Tamarack Alters Design**

"Paula Maccabee, executive director and counsel for environmental group WaterLegacy, said Talon's news release, coupled with the project plan submitted to the DNR last week, "raise issues of

purpose, viability and potential adverse effects on workers as well as nearby Minnesota communities and ecosystems.”

Furthermore, Talon’s greenwashing is wearing thin,” Maccabee said “The purpose of its proposed mine, unsurprisingly, is simply to extract sulfide ores for profit. ... Talon is wasting Minnesota’s time to review a project based on speculative technology that isn’t even at a pilot project stage. Nothing about Talon’s sulfide mine proposal is trustworthy”

*Proposed Nickel Mine Near Tamarack Alters Design, December 28, 2024, by Jimmy Lovrien*

<https://www.duluthnewtribune.com/news/local/proposed-nickel-mine-near-tamarack-alters-design>

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## Who We Are

Tamarack Water Alliance is a group of local residents and landowners working together with others from across Minnesota to protect water and community health from the dangers of sulfide mining near our beloved lakes and wild rice beds, at the headwaters of the Kettle River and in the Mississippi River watershed. Visit our website [here](https://tamarackwateralliance.org/index.html) (https://tamarackwateralliance.org/index.html)

A proposal by a foreign owned mining company, Talon Metals/Rio Tinto to mine nickel and other metals near Tamarack in Aitkin County threatens the health of our communities. This kind of sulfide mining, especially in water-rich environments, has never been done without severe impacts to water and the health of those downstream. Mining here is also a threat to environmental justice and the long-term economic security of nearby native and rural communities.

Review our [community slide presentation](#) (tamarackwateralliance.org/docs/TamarackMineConcerns-Consolidated.pdf) and download [informative flyers](#) (tamarackwateralliance.org/resources.html):

- Talon Mine Risks,
- Geology of Aitkin County,
- High Sulfide Mines Create Acid Mine Drainage,
- Nickel Not Needed for Future EV Batteries,
- Minnesota's Prime Wild Rice Lakes Under Threat,
- Minnesota Regulators Poor Record In Protecting The Environment,
- Eagle Mine Environmental Report & Saving Our Meager Nickel Reserves
- Prove It First! (The AFL-CIO Has Its Facts Wrong!)



- Green Bridge Metals - Canadian proposed sulfide mine near Duluth seeks to acquire battery rich mineral assets
- Copper and The Green Economy

We are producing this monthly newsletter to keep you informed about this project, to share information and opportunities to act, and to invite you to gatherings where you can connect with others who share a passion for clean water and community health.



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