



Tamarack Water Alliance Community Zoom Meeting Wednesday, June 5, 2024 10am CT

Hello from the Tamarack Water Alliance! If you are new to our email list we welcome you. Local residents who volunteer with Tamarack Water Alliance compile and send this monthly newsletter to share updates, invitations, and informational articles.

Everyone is invited to attend our open community virtual Zoom meeting on **Wednesday, June 5, 2024 at 10am CT. Topic: Defending Water, Defending Life with Dr. Al Gedicks**, environmental sociologist and Indigenous rights activist and scholar. Metallic sulfide mine conflicts from the Great Lakes Region to El Salvador have all revolved around the effects of mining on water and the rights of rural and Indigenous communities to defend themselves against ecologically destructive mining projects.

Dr. Gedicks has written extensively about Indigenous and popular resistance to ecologically destructive mining and oil projects. In 1977 he founded the Center for Alternative Mining Development Policy and assisted the Mole Lake Sokaogon Ojibwe Tribe in successfully resisting Exxon's proposed metallic sulfide mine upstream from the tribe's wild rice beds. He is the executive secretary of the Wisconsin Resources Protection Council and presently working with the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin and the Coalition to SAVE the Menominee River to oppose the proposed Back Forty sulfide mine next to the Menominee River on the Wisconsin-Michigan border.

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>)

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 to arrange pickup of your sign.

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

Indigenous Resistance to Mining in the Upper Midwest and Beyond

Dr. Al Gedicks

The geology of the Lake Superior region has attracted over a dozen mining companies seeking to exploit the region's copper, gold, nickel, zinc, iron ore and other metals.[i] This geology coincides with several nineteenth century treaties that the Lake Superior Ojibwe (aka Chippewa, Anishinaabe) signed with the U.S. government. The treaties effectively removed the Ojibwe from Michigan's Keweenaw copper districts and the immense iron ore wealth on northern Minnesota's Mesabi Range. "In each instance, the tribes resisted and the white man triumphed." [ii] However, the tribes retained the right to hunt, fish and gather on the lands that were ceded or surrendered under threat of force.

The recent wave of metallic sulfide mine exploration poses a direct threat to the treaty-guaranteed harvest rights of the region's Indian tribes. In Minnesota, sulfate pollution from iron ore waste rock has destroyed wild rice beds downstream from mining operations.[iii]

Two of the most successful cases of tribal resistance to metallic sulfide mining projects are the Sokaogon Mole Lake Ojibwe and Bad River Ojibwe tribes of Wisconsin. Both tribes experienced anti-Indian and anti-treaty hostility during the Wisconsin Ojibwe treaty rights controversy of the late 1980s.[iv]

Most important for the parallel conflict over mining projects in the ceded territory, “the spearfishing conflict had ironically overcome the ‘invisibility’ of Native Americans in Wisconsin, and educated the non-Indian majority about the legal powers of Native sovereignty on the reservations, treaty rights outside the reservation, and the continuing vitality of Indigenous cultures.”[v]

In 2015 the Bad River Band of Lake Superior Chippewa brought together Native Nations and local communities to defeat what would have been the largest open pit iron mine in the world upstream from Lake Superior and the largest remaining wild rice wetland on the Bad River Chippewa Reservation.[vi]

The most protracted and successful campaign against metallic sulfide mining was the resistance to Exxon Minerals’ proposed Crandon mine in northeastern Wisconsin. Sulfide mining refers to the mining of metals, such as copper, nickel, gold and zinc when embedded in sulfide ore bodies that can produce acid mine drainage. The conflict lasted 28 years (1976-2003) and resulted in the sale of the project and mineral rights to the Mole Lake Chippewa and Forest County Potawatomi tribes. Both tribes have declared the proposed mine site a permanent conservation area off-limits to mining.[vii]

The defeat of Exxon’s world-class zinc and copper project at Crandon by an Indian and environmental alliance was a shock to the international mining industry. Prior to the emergence of an environmental justice movement in the 1980s, large mining and energy corporations, with the cooperation of state regulatory agencies, were able to impose unpopular extractive resource projects upon vulnerable Indian and rural communities in the United States. However, a growing environmental movement combined with a revitalization of tribal sovereignty after the siege of Wounded Knee, South Dakota in 1973, changed the political landscape for extractive resource projects.

The resistance to the Crandon mine went far beyond the problems of a single mining project and posed a challenge to the permitting process. State regulatory agencies routinely accepted the mining industry’s claim that metallic sulfide mining technology could protect the environment. However, the permit process did not require the mining applicant to prove that this could be done. The history of metallic sulfide mining provided overwhelming evidence to the contrary. [viii]

The opponents of the Crandon mine proposed and successfully enacted a “Prove It First” sulfide mine moratorium law in 1998. The law required that prospective miners must first provide an example of a sulfide mine that has not polluted surface or groundwater during or

after mining. For the next twenty years, the mining industry failed to provide an example of a non-polluting sulfide mine. The mining industry lobby repealed the law in 2017 but they couldn't kill the idea. The Minnesota environmental community is now pushing for a Prove It First law.

Al Gedicks is the executive secretary of the Wisconsin Resources Protection Council and emeritus professor of environmental sociology at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse.

[i] John Flesher, "Troubled mining industry now resurgent in Midwest," Associated Press, June 10, 2014; Karina Atkins, "Dirty Water and Dead Rice: The Cost of the Clean Energy Transition in Rural Minnesota," Inside Climate News, November 21, 2023.

[ii] Robert Keller, "An Economic History of Indian Treaties in the Great Lakes Region," American Indian Journal (February 1978).

[iii] John Lindgren et al., "A Study of the St. Louis River," Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, Section of Fisheries, Completion Report 2006.

[iv] Zoltan Grossman, *Unlikely Alliances: Native Nations and White Communities Join to Defend Rural Lands*. Seattle: University of Washington Press 2017; Patty Loew and James Thannum, "After the Storm: Ojibwe Treaty Rights Twenty-Five Years After the Voigt Decision," American Indian Quarterly 35:2 (Spring 2011)

[v] Al Gedicks and Zoltan Grossman, "Defending a Common Home: Native/non-Native Alliances against Mining Corporations in Wisconsin," in *In the Way of Development: Indigenous Peoples, Life Projects and Globalization*, ed. Mario Blaser, Harvey A. Feit, Glenn McRae (London: Zed Books, 2004), p. 189.

[vi] Al Gedicks, "Defeating the Iron Mines in Wisconsin: Wisconsin tribes, environmental groups, and local citizens defeat iron mine," Z Magazine 28:6, June 2015.

[vii] Ron Seely, "Tribes make it official: There won't be mining," Wisconsin State Journal, October 30, 2003.

[viii] Robert Kleinman, "Acid Mine Drainage," Engineering and Mining Journal 190:7, July 1989.



THE MINING INDUSTRY NEEDS TO CLEAN UP ITS ACT

"Facts indicate that mining contributes very little to the Minnesota economy ... but contributes a great deal to the story of pollution and environmental damage on the Iron Range." ... the Bureau of Economic Analysis notes that, in the third quarter of 2023, the real Gross Domestic Product for Minnesota was \$472.8 billion in goods and services per year. Thus, the mining-related \$2 billion is just 0.4% of the total --mining contributes a very small amount to the Minnesota economy (less than half of a percent).

...In fact, the Iron Range has many tailings basins that store highly polluted runoff from Iron Range mines past and present.....Indeed, a University of Minnesota study spanning six years found that every year spent working in the Iron Range mining industry increased the risk of contracting mesothelioma by 3% and that Iron Range mine workers suffered the disease at three times the rate of Minnesota's general population...

...The fact is, the mining industry seems to work very hard to bypass environmental rules and regulations, to the detriment of both local communities and the environment...

Tom Anderson, [In Response, Duluth News Tribune, May 7, 2024](https://www.duluthnewstribune.com/opinion/columns/in-response-the-mining-industry-needs-to-clean-up-its-act)
<https://www.duluthnewstribune.com/opinion/columns/in-response-the-mining-industry-needs-to-clean-up-its-act>

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](https://tamarackwateralliance.org/docs/TamarackMineConcerns-Consolidated.pdf) (tamarackwateralliance.org/docs/TamarackMineConcerns-Consolidated.pdf) and download [informative flyers](https://tamarackwateralliance.org/resources.html) (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

We will be sending 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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