

Al Christianson: The real Flambeau Mine story

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It is refreshing to me to learn that legislation is being introduced to lift Wisconsin's long-standing moratorium on metallic mineral mining. We here in northern Wisconsin can potentially share in the economic gains that our neighbors in northern Minnesota and Michigan are looking forward to with current mining projects under development. After all, if we are to prosper again we need to look at how we were built in the first place; by logging, agriculture and mining.

Wisconsin's moratorium cleverly, but unfairly, created an artificial standard that does not allow for the Flambeau Mine at Ladysmith to be cited as an example of a mine that had operated successfully in our state. Although successful and environmentally sound, the Flambeau Mine played out in five years rather than the required ten.

I have enjoyed a long tenure as Ladysmith's City Administrator. I was new in this role when Flambeau Mining sought to permit the mine in the late 1980s. Since a part of the Flambeau Mine was located within the city limits, I have been involved with it from its inception through its construction, actual mining, reclamation, issuance of the completion certificate, and now post closure.

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It is time to quit judging mining by how it was done a century or even decades ago. Please consider it in the context of state of the art mining technology. Other industries aren't judged this way. They are judged by how they operate today in a world where advances in technology and safety are made daily. It is also time to lift

the moratorium and let the people of northern Wisconsin decide whether they want to host mining as they were able to for most of our history. Remember why we were known as The Badger State.

Even though the last ore was mined over two decades ago, Ladysmith continues to get inquiries about supposed mining related problems. That never ceases to amaze me considering local residents like me are unaware of any. Then again, why would we be? They didn't happen. What did happen was the mine provided an incredible economic boost that remains in town today. The city of Ladysmith can thank the Flambeau Mine for a new library, jobs, a new airport, jobs, a new visitor center, jobs, and a new school playground.

Individuals spent a considerable amount of time and money to prove that some runoff from a parking lot at an office building picked up trace amounts of mineral. In my estimation the time and effort spent proving that used a lot more of the earth's resources and a lot more people's time unnecessarily than the supposed problem itself. Scare tactics used to try to stop or slow mining should be brought elsewhere.

The economic decline that is currently underway will continue to drive our children away if this goes on unabated. Allow northern counties a means to deal with aging and declining populations resulting from economic stagnation and allow mineral production taxes to flow south rather than just sending transfer payment north.

Wisconsin has some of the strongest environmental regulations in the world. We need to take some responsibility for what we use. Don't force the metals you all use daily to be mined in places where regulations are weak, if they exist at all. Allow good paying, mining jobs to once again support Wisconsin families. Let it be "Made in Wisconsin".

Don't take my word for any of this though. When you are traveling in the Ladysmith area, stop by one of the local gas stations or restaurants. Fill your tank and get a bite to eat. Stop at a shop. We'll be glad to have you. Ask the gas station attendant, your waitress or the ubiquitous "man on the street" about the Flambeau Mine. Ask them what they know about it. Probably very little if anything, which is a good thing. If there were a problem they certainly would know. Ask the local fishing guide who says the best fishing in the area is along the stretch of the Flambeau that passes by the former mine site. Then ask these folks what the Flambeau Mine did for the community. They may tell you about the beautiful library that mine dollars paid most of the cost of, or the nice playground at the local elementary school. They

may tell you about the hundreds of jobs that were added in the local economy as a result of investment of mining revenues into other business ventures. I believe a large majority of local citizens will tell you they would welcome with open arms consideration of another mine in this area.

Before you draw conclusions about the Flambeau Mine look to see where the information came from. If you want to find out the real story, visit us. Find out from the people like me who witnessed it from the start and hear what we have to say.

This is the Real Flambeau Mine Story.

— *Christianson is Ladysmith's city administrator.*