

Mining bill passes with key amendment to win support from GOP senators

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The Assembly passed the GOP sulfide mining bill on a 53-38 vote Thursday with a key amendment to win over among some holdout Senate Republicans.

Bill co-author Sen. Tom Tiffany, R-Hazelhurst, told WisPolitics.com earlier this week he was one vote short in the Senate. But fellow co-author Rep. Rob Hutton told reporters prior to the vote that the amendment ensures there's enough GOP support for it to clear that chamber.

Still, four Assembly Republicans joined all Dems in voting against the bill, with one [in a statement](#) following the vote citing concerns surrounding groundwater pollution.

The amendment is made up of five different provisions, including one that would delay the bill's implementation for six months after the legislation's signed to give local governments time to evaluate their own mining ordinances.

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Other provisions would: require mining operations to be paused during a contested case hearing; clarify the 10,000-ton bulk sampling limit includes everything removed from the earth; and further language regarding the proposed technology to be used at the mining site.

The last, an addition from an earlier draft this afternoon, would ensure mining companies can't shift revenues or profits to another operation outside of the state or community to prevent the hosting community from receiving the tax revenue it should from the mining operation.

Dems argued, though, that the mining jobs that could be created would come at the expense of water, air and land pollution, saying the existing “Prove It First” mining law should be maintained.

Under current law, companies seeking a sulfide mining permit must prove they operated for 10 years and were closed for 10 years without polluting groundwater or surface water. The bill would remove those requirements.

Rep. Katrina Shankland called the bill “a giveaway to the dirtiest industry in America.”

The legislation, the Stevens Point Dem said “represents seven years of Republicans waging an attack against public waters.”

And she urged legislators to consult with the state’s tribal nations, many of whom registered against it, including Ho-Chunk and Oneida Nations, as well as the Menominee Indian Tribe.

But Republicans countered the bill would help bring jobs to northern Wisconsin, adding the legislation doesn’t change any environmental standards and also lays out a permitting process that would allow for public input.

Hutton, R-Brookfield, also addressed Dem support for the 1998 law, saying if the bill intended to “provide guardrails” while still allowing sulfide mining, the bill was “an abysmal failure.”

“If the intent (of “Prove It First”) was to eliminate mining from Wisconsin’s future forever, then I would say it certainly has been successful,” he said.

Prior to the vote, Dems offered an amendment that would hold local governments harmless should pollution as a result of sulfide mining occur, arguing it was necessary to avoid taxpayers paying the bill for mining companies down the road.

Rep. Romaine Quinn, though, argued the bill already gives local communities agency, adding it’s “nor fair for state taxpayers if a local community decides to go with the (mining) permit.”

The bill now heads to the Senate, where it previously cleared a committee on a party-line vote. The four GOP lawmakers who opposed it were: Reps. Todd Novak, R-Dodgeville; Jeff Mursau, R-Crivitz; Pat Snyder, R-Schofield; and Travis Tranel, R-Cuba

City.

[See the GOP amendment.](#)

[See the roll call vote.](#)