

River Alliance of Wisconsin: Urges the State Assembly to vote NO on AB 499

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“The Assembly Committee on Labor has moved Wisconsin one-step closer to harming local tourism and agriculture industries by removing long-standing, bi-partisan rules that have protected Wisconsin from sulfide mine pollution,” stated Raj Shukla, executive Director of the River Alliance of Wisconsin. River Alliance of Wisconsin urges the State Assembly to vote NO on AB 499.

River Alliance of Wisconsin believes the amendments to AB 499 that were approved today, the same ones the Senate Committee on Sporting Heritage, Mining and Forestry approved, are as weak as the rationale for the original bill. Our position has not changed on AB 499. None of the amendments fulfill our long-standing commitment to protect the environment and local businesses. River Alliance of Wisconsin remains strongly opposed to this bill because of the threat it poses to our waters, the economy, and Wisconsin’s way of life. We will be leaving taxpayers at risk of paying for the cleanup when Wisconsin becomes the laboratory for unproven mining technologies. “Our current laws require mining companies to prove in advance that any sulfide mine has operated safely. This bill now allows companies like Aquila Resources to claim to have the technology to be capable of operating safely. Capable is far from proven and not worth the risk,” stated Shukla.

AB 499 still repeals the “Prove it First” law. Wisconsin’s sulfide mining laws were

approved 20 years ago in a bi-partisan effort to protect our waters. None of the amendments honors the success of the “Prove it First” law; since its inception, Wisconsin has not introduced sulfide mine pollution like sulfuric acid and cyanide into local waters and surrounding communities. Governor Walker, Senator Darling and others worked with Democrats and the entire environmental community to pass this common-sense compromise.

Wisconsin’s agriculture and tourism industries require clean water to thrive, especially in Northern Wisconsin. Every sulfide mine in a water-rich environment has polluted. This bill puts the Wisconsin we love at tremendous risk, with any benefits going to foreign investors and out-of-state corporations. Mines that pollute local resources risk local businesses that sustain communities. Per the Bureau of Labor Statistics, Wisconsin is home to about 4,000 (seasonally adjusted) “Mining, Logging, and Construction” jobs; far less than the nearly 285,000 “Leisure and Hospitality” jobs that support the tourism industry. We cannot sacrifice local businesses and local water quality to enrich out-of-state mining companies that can promise just a few temporary jobs in return. And we shouldn’t bet that out-of-state mining companies will prevent local damage based on a hope that technology is “capable” of protecting Wisconsin communities.

Our economy depends on clean water for agriculture, tourism, and other local businesses. We put it all at risk with short-term mining projects that could cause decades of environmental and economic damage. This bill profits out-of-state mining companies and jeopardizes existing local businesses and the Wisconsin way of life.

Wisconsin needs to maintain an economy built on businesses that enrich our lives and protect our environment. The workforce of the future demands it. We urge the Assembly to consider their interests instead of the desires of mining companies and reject AB 499.

About the River Alliance of Wisconsin:

Formed in 1993, River Alliance of Wisconsin is a statewide non-profit, non-partisan citizen advocacy organization that works to protect and restore Wisconsin’s rivers and watersheds. The organization’s membership includes more than 2,500 individuals and businesses and more than 80 local watershed groups – one of the largest memberships of statewide river groups in the country. For more information, visit www.wisconsinrivers.org