

The Nature Conservancy: Mining legislation would put Wisconsin's lands and waters at risk

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The following is a statement from Mary Jean Huston, State Director of The Nature Conservancy in Wisconsin:

MADISON, Wis. — The Nature Conservancy is opposed to Senate Bill 395 and Assembly Bill 499, which seek to repeal current state law on nonferrous metallic mining popularly referred to as the Prove It First mining law.

The Nature Conservancy is not anti-mining. We recognize that metals like copper, lead and zinc are important to our economy.

We are, however, in favor of protecting Wisconsin's natural resources, and we are concerned that this legislation, if passed, could put at risk the lands and waters we depend on for our health, our economy, and the quality of life we enjoy here in Wisconsin.

All mining has some impacts on our air, land and water. These include scarring of the land; heavy metal contamination of lakes, rivers and groundwater; acid rain; and the lowering of water levels in lakes, rivers and groundwater aquifers.

In other places, mining companies have not always taken responsibility for cleaning up mine pollution, and efforts to hold them accountable have not always been

successful. Ignoring a company's past mining practices and releasing them from clean-up responsibility after a mine is closed amounts to forgetting the past and putting the future at risk. This is not a good idea, particularly with sulfide mines. We want to avoid this type of situation in Wisconsin.

While several changes in the bills concern us, The Nature Conservancy is particularly concerned about the removal of the Irrevocable Trust Fund for mining damage. The Irrevocable Trust Fund was specifically created by the Legislature as a savings account that would last in perpetuity and be available to pay for cleaning up damage caused by mining even years after the mine was closed. The Trust Fund not only protects our lands and water, it also protects taxpayers from having to pay the cost of future clean up should the mining company fail to do so.

Current Wisconsin mining laws contain the provisions that allow professional staff to design and set standards for operation of a mine that will be economically viable and do the least environmental damage. The law also contains the long-term Irrevocable Trust Fund that provides all Wisconsin citizens with a guaranteed clean-up fund that will always be there. Let's not pass bills like Senate Bill 395 or Assembly Bill 499 that take away these safeguards and unnecessarily put our lands, waters and future at risk.