

# GREAT LAKES INDIAN FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION

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## • MEMBER TRIBES •

### MICHIGAN

Bay Mills Community  
Keweenaw Bay Community  
Lac Vieux Desert Band

### WISCONSIN

Bad River Band  
Lac Courte Oreilles Band  
Lac du Flambeau Band

### MINNESOTA

Fond du Lac Band  
Mille Lacs Band

**For Immediate Release**

**April 5, 2006**

### "Contaminated discharge continues at Kennecott Minerals' Flambeau Mine"

**Odanah, WI --** Four years after Kennecott Minerals Company notified the State of Wisconsin that it had reclaimed the Flambeau mine site, the company's own reports document an ongoing release of contaminants at the site. These unresolved contamination issues are causing unease among officials at Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Commission (GLIFWC).

"The Flambeau mine site continues to be a source of contaminants to waters of the state, and efforts by Kennecott to fix the problems have been unsuccessful," said Mic Isham, Vice Chairman of GLIFWC's Voigt Intertribal Task Force. "In addition to the negative environmental impacts at the site, this raises questions about the safety of future sulfide mining projects."

Containing copper, silver and gold ore, the mine located on the Flambeau River just south of Ladysmith, Wis. operated from 1991-1997. The orebody is what is known as a sulfide deposit, meaning that the metals are bonded to sulfur, forming sulfide minerals. When exposed to air and moisture, a chemical reaction generates sulfuric acid that can leach into the surrounding environment and can cause the release of metals such as copper. Previous efforts to control contamination at the site involved removal of the company's rail spur and its gravel base. In spite of these efforts, discharges of contaminated water continue, and copper has been measured in this water at levels several times the state standard for surface waters.

The latest remediation plan involves removal of a gravel parking lot. However, it is unclear whether this will resolve the problem because the extent of the contaminated soil is unknown. GLIFWC has asked the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources to hold Kennecott accountable for the ongoing problems at the site and to require the company to perform additional investigations into the sources and extent of the contamination.

These problems are fueling additional concerns for GLIFWC's Voigt Intertribal Task Force. Kennecott recently submitted permit applications to Michigan regulators to construct and operate a new sulfide mine on the Yellow Dog Plains, an undeveloped expanse of wild land situated between the Keweenaw Bay Indian Community and the City of Marquette.

GLIFWC is a natural resource management agency representing 11 Ojibwe tribes in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Upper Michigan. The Voigt Intertribal Task Force makes policy recommendations on the management of resources across lands ceded to the United States in the Treaties of 1837 and 1842. Known as the ceded territory, GLIFWC shares management responsibility in the region along with state and federal officials.

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### **Background:**

In 2001 Kennecott filed a Notice of Completion for their reclamation of the Flambeau Mine. However, samples since 1999 show an ongoing discharge of contaminated water from the site into a small stream adjacent to the mine. In an attempt to stem the flow of contaminated runoff, in 2003 Kennecott was ordered by the State to remove and haul to a landfill, 7,400 tons of contaminated soil from the rail spur at the site.

In 2004 copper levels were measured at 9,900 ug/L in runoff within the mine site boundaries. In October of 2005 Kennecott Minerals' Flambeau Mining Company (FMC) released a report on 2005 monitoring of runoff within the mine site and discharging from the mine site. This report showed that runoff within the site still contained high levels of metals, with copper levels reaching 100,000 ug/L. One area with particularly high metals concentration in runoff was a gravel parking lot in an area that served as a truck service area during mining. The water discharging from the runoff holding pond at the edge of the mine site is substantially less contaminated but has been measured by the company in 2005 to contain 27 to 61 ug/L of copper. For reference, the acute toxicity water quality standard for copper is 7 ug/L, and the 61 ug/L of copper exceeds the levels that FMC's permit allowed them to discharge the Flambeau River during active mining.

More recent FMC documents (dated November 22, 2005) show that there is contaminated soil at the site with copper concentrations ranging up to 1,500 mg/kg. This is very similar to the level of contamination found at the site rail spur back in 1998 and 2003. These recently discovered contaminated soils are in the area that had showed high concentrations of metals in runoff during sampling in 2004 and 2005. Because of these contaminated soils and the ongoing discharge of contaminated runoff, the Wisconsin DNR has ordered Kennecott to remove the top 4 inches of soil over a 10,500 square yard area and replace the ground surface with geofabric and gravel to prevent upward migration of additional contaminated soil that will remain at the site at greater depth. The 1,200 cubic yards of contaminated soil that is to be removed will be hauled to a landfill licensed for disposal of special waste. The WDNR has also asked that FMC continue to sample surface waters running off from the area found to be contaminated.

According to WDNR staff, the assumption is that the identified contamination came from spillage or tracking of high sulfide material by trucks that traveled between the pit, the ore loading area and the mine operation buildings. There are other areas of the site that experienced similar truck traffic yet have not been tested for contaminated soil.

Documents and data referenced here can be found at:  
<https://mywebspace.wisc.edu/jcolema1/flambeau/reports/>

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