



Oneida County Lakes and Rivers Association

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April 20, 2020

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METALLIC SULFIDE MINING IN ONEIDA COUNTY Position Statement from Oneida County Lakes and Rivers Association

The mission of the Oneida County Lakes and Rivers Association is to protect and preserve the quality and riparian habitat of our county's inland waters. Accordingly, OCLRA and its lake association and individual members will strongly oppose any project that presents a significant threat to our surface waters or groundwater, whether from mining, concentrated animal feeding operations (CAFOs) or any other source.

Our organization will use science-based evidence to inform the public of such threats and will use media outlets, public meetings and other channels to distribute information to Oneida County property owners. Preserving the quality of our lakes, rivers, and streams for today and for the future is paramount in sustaining our economy, aesthetics and way of life for our citizens.

The proposal by Badger Minerals to conduct test drillings for sulfide minerals in the Town of Schoepke, in the headwaters area of the Wolf River, has again raised serious concern about the environmental impacts of mining in this lake-rich region of Wisconsin. We believe that any sulfide mining proposal in our county must undergo regulatory review with the utmost care and with the requirement that the protection of our water resources is the paramount consideration.

In 2018, more than 62% of Oneida County voters opposed a proposal for a sulfide mine upstream of the Willow Flowage, which is of regional significance. The Wolf River, meanwhile, is a waterway of statewide importance and extremely significant to the Menominee Nation downstream. Both of these are recognized by the State of Wisconsin as Outstanding Resource Waters; the Wolf is also a federally recognized Wild and Scenic River.

Furthermore, Oneida County has 1,129 lakes encompassing 106.95 square miles; 222,600 acres of wetlands covering 347.81 square miles (28.2%) of the county; and more than 800 miles of rivers and streams, many home to naturally reproducing trout populations.

Leaving aside their incalculable recreational, cultural and aesthetic values, these water resources form the backbone of the Oneida County economy. In 2019, the county's residential waterfront properties were assessed at \$4.2 billion, representing 73% of total assessed value and generating \$85.5 million of property tax revenue. In addition, maintaining the health of the lakes and rivers is crucial to the tourism and recreational economy on which the county depends: Visitors to the county annually spend some \$229 million at hundreds of resorts, stores, restaurants, hotels and numerous other local businesses.

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Our Mission: To protect Oneida County waters and habitats through:

**** Education * Collaboration * Advocacy***

METALLIC SULFIDE MINING IN ONEIDA COUNTY
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The mineral deposits in Oneida County are associated with ancient rocks of volcanic origin. These deposits were buried under thick layers of glacial drift and water when the glaciers receded. Our lakes, streams, and wetlands are intimately connected to the water contained in this glacial material. The pumping required to keep an underground sulfide mine reasonably dry has potential to reduce surrounding lake and groundwater levels, reduce stream flows, and impair wetland function.

Furthermore, these deposits contain minerals that are compounds of metal and sulfur; the mining and milling of the metallic ore creates an enormous amount of waste material (tailings) which, if not properly stored, will become exposed to air and water. This leads to acid drainage that, as experience with numerous sulfide mines has shown, can damage downstream waters and decimate fisheries for hundreds of years. High costs to repair such damage often fall upon the public, long after the mining concerns have profited and left town.

In recent years, Wisconsin's mining regulations have been significantly changed in ways designed to make it easier for mining companies to receive permits and run their operations. The concern is that these changes have come at the expenses of local public involvement and the protection of lakes, streams, wetlands, groundwater, and the environment in general.

The future of Oneida County depends on protecting our water resources now and for generations to come. We appreciate that metallic mining is an essential industry that if conducted responsibly can bring economic benefits in jobs and tax revenue. However, those considerations can never override the importance of maintaining the scenic, environmental and economic value of the county's waters. Any mine that threatens those values has no place in Oneida County.