

# Duluth News Tribune

## Anti-mining crusade mushes through Duluth

Frank Moe, a former Minnesota legislator, will leave Duluth today to deliver petitions expressing concern about a new form of mining in Minnesota. He'll be traveling by dog sled.

By: Peter Passi, Duluth News Tribune

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Frank Moe, a former Minnesota legislator turned courier with a cause, will leave Duluth today behind a team of panting dogs pulling for the state Capitol. His sled will be stuffed with petitions signed by about 10,000 people concerned by the threat of water pollution a new form of mining in Minnesota could unleash.

The petitions call on the Legislature to put the brakes on plans to develop copper-nickel mines in northern Minnesota, unless contamination concerns involving sulfides and heavy metals can be satisfactorily addressed.

"We're delivering a very clear message that the people of northern Minnesota care more about clean water than about making billions of dollars for some multinational corporation," Moe said.

Moe and his dog team sledged into Duluth's Lester Park shortly after 3 p.m. Sunday, where they were welcomed by a crowd of 100-plus like-minded opponents of copper-nickel mining.

Among Moe's supporters Sunday were Liz Sivertson and John Gruber of Grand Marais, who came wearing papier-mache headware depicting a moose and fish.

"I'm really concerned about allowing sulfide mining in the Lake Superior watershed," Sivertson said. "This kind of mining has never before been tried in a wetland area."

Sivertson pointed out that mining that has exposed sulfide deposits in other parts of the nation has often resulted in the release of damaging pollutants, including sulfuric acid.

"It's proven to be terribly toxic to all forms of life in rivers, streams and lakes. I don't think we can afford the same," she said, noting that the stakes are especially high as Lake Superior contains about 10 percent of the world's supply of surface freshwater.

PolyMet, the company first in line to develop nonferrous mining in Northeastern Minnesota, shares the same concern for protecting water quality, said Brad Moore, the company's executive vice president for public, governmental and environmental affairs.

"As a user of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness for most of my life, and as someone who has spent much time on the St. Louis River canoeing, wild ricing, hunting and fishing, I care just as much about water quality as Frank Moe and his companion," he said.

Moore said the project is in the midst of an extensive, time-consuming environmental review, and he asked people to reserve judgment.

“We think people should let the process work the way it’s supposed to, as opposed to attacking the project based on old, outdated information,” he said.

PolyMet has pointed out that the rock in the proposed mine area is unusually low in sulfur for a copper deposit. PolyMet also contends that it can take precautions when digging and storing rock and by using new technology to minimize acid runoff while treating any runoff that occurs.

Despite assurances, opponents of nonferrous mining have stepped up their campaign.

“The most important thing for people to know is that this is about the whole Arrowhead. It will affect people’s homes, cabins, lives and how we are able to enjoy this region,” said Kristin Larsen with the Friends of the Cloquet Valley State Forest.

“This is a grass-roots effort by people who are simply concerned about water pollution. It’s not anti-mining. We’re saying ‘no’ to toxic mining drainage and ‘yes’ to clean water,” said Sue Schurke of Ely, one of the organizers of the petition drive.

While PolyMet expects to create 360 mining jobs on the Range and other would-be copper-nickel operations aim to follow suit, Moe said those positions would disappear over time, as ore bodies are exhausted. Meanwhile, he said about 30,000 jobs associated with tourism and recreation would be imperiled.

Moe began his journey in Grand Marais along with fellow musher Adam Harju on Wednesday. Simultaneously, David and Amy Freeman took off with their sled dog team from Ely, with a pile of petitions in tow. The teams rendezvoused in Finland on Saturday, with Moe and Harju tapped to complete the trek.

Moe, who has been mushing since 1999, said recent snows have produced the best sledding conditions he has ever encountered on the North Shore Trail. He plans to complete the trip to St. Paul entirely under dog power. He said the dogs will need to be transported across two busy roadways, Highways 53 and 23, but, other than that, he believes he can dogsled clear to the Capitol by Thursday.

Supporters will gather once more in Duluth from 9-10 a.m. today to wish Moe and Harju safe travels on the final leg of their journey. The send-off will occur at the Willard Munger Inn, 7408 Grand Ave.

The two mushers will trade off and will travel shadowed by three vehicles and a support team, including a veterinarian who will monitor the health of sled dogs night and day, Moe said.