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Statement by Congressman Richard M. Nolan  
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Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement  
NorthMet Mining Project and Land Exchange  
Proposed for portions of St. Louis and Lake County, Minnesota

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## **The NorthMet Mining Project and Land Exchange Should go Forward.**

After a great deal of study and review, I am convinced the NorthMet Mining Project and Land Exchange proposal encompasses the state of the art technologies necessary to protect our environment, promote health and safety, and create good paying jobs we need to assure the future of our region.

Moreover, by opening the door to development of the Duluth Complex – one of the largest reserves of copper and nickel the world – this project will establish a global standard for environmental stewardship.

With these factors in mind, I fully support the NorthMet Mining Project and Land Exchange, the adoption of the Final EIS, and the Permit to Mine.

### **NorthMet Project Meets Highest Regulatory Standards of State and Federal Agencies**

The NorthMet project and land exchange is being proposed at a time far removed from mining ventures of the distant past. Early in the development of mining in the United States, environmental consequences were little understood and as a result the legacy to clean up those sites has fallen to the public. As a result of those lessons learned, today we have the highest and most sophisticated regulatory structure in history. Regulations are in place today insuring not only that every environmental impact is monitored and regulated, but that companies responsible have strong financial assurances guaranteeing that sufficient resources are available to restore mining sites and prevent future environmental damage.

### **NorthMet Project Meets Mixed Use Goals of National Forest Policy**

The NorthMet project area is contained within the Superior National Forest. The US Forest Service (USFS) is charged with the responsibility to optimize the growth of the forest resource according to a mixed use plan that accommodates tourism, mining and industrial development, all subject to strict environmental standards. Mining is not a new activity in the Superior National Forest. There are currently four active iron mines in the Superior National Forest, with a mining history going back since its

creation in the early 1900's. The NorthMet Project is also contained entirely within the Lake Superior Watershed District and will not affect the waters flowing into the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW).

The land exchange negotiated between PolyMet, Inc., the proponent of the NorthMet project, and the USFS, will enhance the overall resources of the Superior National Forest, and enable the USFS to better meet its long term mission. There will not be an environmental degradation to these existing forest lands, as the project is designed. Overall, there will be an increase in forest lands available for management, and the expansion of public recreation areas, which will complement and enhance the attractions for tourism and recreation, a vitally important business of Northeastern Minnesota.

### **NorthMet Project Will Set Environmental Protection Precedents for the Future**

The NorthMet project will be the first copper-nickel mine to develop a portion of the rich mineral deposits in the Duluth Gabbro Complex. From all reports, this is the largest undeveloped deposit of copper, nickel, and various other precious metals in the world. The SDEIS has demonstrated that the NorthMet Project can achieve an unprecedented goal of sulfate emissions of less than 10 mg/l, a standard that will in fact improve the water quality of the nearby Embarrass River. The NorthMet project will re-use the former LTV taconite mine and plant, cleaning up this site and recycling valuable infrastructure.

In addition, the plan for site reclamation will restore both the mining and project site to a natural environmental state, encapsulating the waste rock and preventing acid rock drainage into the foreseeable future. I believe the NorthMet Project will set a standard for excellence that will pave the way for future responsible mineral development in this region.

### **The NorthMet Project means permanent long term jobs**

The NorthMet Project will produce over 500 construction jobs for this region and 350 permanent jobs over the life of this mine. However, there are many thousands of additional jobs at stake in the future development of the Duluth Gabbro Complex which, if done correctly, promises an economic opportunity for the next 100 to 200

years. Not unlike the past 132 years of iron ore and taconite mining that have sustained the economy of this region, environmentally responsible mining in the Duluth Gabbro Complex can be an economic boon for residents.

One must also take into account the secondary jobs created as well. There will be businesses supplying materials to the copper-nickel mining industry in this region. There will be businesses providing food, clothing and shelter. Transportation, health care, education: all economic sectors of the economy will receive a positive impact from the mining activity proposed in this region.

### **The Duluth-Gabbro Complex Contains Minerals of Strategic National Importance**

Beyond the direct and indirect jobs created, responsible development of the copper-nickel reserves of the Duluth Gabbro is also a serious strategic national priority. Today the USA imports 100% of the nickel and over 1/3 of the copper needed in modern industry, critical to our national economic development as well as to our national defense. In addition, platinum and a host of other strategic minerals appear to exist in significant enough quantities to be extracted economically.

To those who say we can get these minerals from other sources, I would argue that is a short sighted alternative. While Iron Ore was available in various parts of the world in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was the Iron Range of Minnesota that supplied the raw materials needed to create America's industrial strength, as well as the ships, tanks and artillery that helped the United States and Allied Powers defeat the Axis powers of Germany, Italy and Japan. Our nation's steel production was absolutely a deciding factor in the outcome of World War II.

A nation without the capacity to produce its own mineral wealth is at an enormous strategic disadvantage. In fact, it was the absence of raw materials that propelled Japan into war with the United States. Currently there are dozens of critical strategic and rare earth minerals needed by American Industry that are not mined in the United States.

The metals that will be mined in this region are critical and essential to our modern computer, electronics, and communications industries. In addition, these metals are essential for the development of green technologies that will improve our air quality,

create energy independence for our nation, and reduce carbon emissions that threaten our climate worldwide.

National investment in green technologies has grown by over 400% in the past 8 years, exceeding \$50 billion. Renewable energy accounted for fully half of all new capacity installed in 2012, according to the US Department of Energy.

Every modern catalytic converter contains platinum and palladium and reduces air pollution. Every cellphone contains copper and palladium and advances our ability to improve our communications while conserving resources. Every lithium-ion battery contains nickel, cobalt, manganese and many other critical minerals and helps reduce the use of carbon based fossil fuels. New hybrid vehicles, with over 75 pounds of copper, increase our energy efficiency and reduce carbon emissions.

Without these metals, we cannot have a green future. Without American production of these minerals we put our nation at risk in a dangerous world. These factors must be taken into consideration when weighing the costs and benefits of the NorthMet Project, and it would be irresponsible for us to do otherwise.

### **Recommendations**

While the environmental review process for the project is still ongoing, I am convinced the plan put forward for the NorthMet Mining Project and Land Exchange will result in a productive mining operation that will produce minimal environmental impacts and will advance the technology of mining. It will set a high standard for additional mining proposals that may follow.

The SDEIS represents a plan, however, and execution of the plan will require vigorous monitoring and enforcement of the project features set forth in this document, and a solid Financial Assurance package that will enable the mining site reclamation to be completed if the project should fail or be abandoned at any point in the process going forward. I also insist that Cultural Impacts be carefully protected in the plans going forward, before the Final Permit to Mine is issued by the Minnesota DNR.

I urge the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, the United States Army Corps of Engineers, and the US Forest Service as the primary lead co-agencies, the

Minnesota Pollution Control Agency as a prime contributing agency, together with the major cooperating agencies including the US Environmental Protection Agency, the Tribal Cooperating Agencies at Bois Forte, Grand Portage and Fond du Lac, together with all other responsible agencies to move forward with final modifications and to adoption of the Final EIS in a timely manner.

I also urge all responsible agencies to issue the Permit to Mine, complete the land transfers proposed, issue the necessary supplemental permits, and permit the NorthMet Project to proceed at the earliest possible date.

Sincerely,



Richard M. Nolan

Member of Congress

8<sup>th</sup> Congressional District of Minnesota