

SUPPORT

LD 1302, An Act to Amend the Maine Metallic Mineral Mining Act to Protect Water Quality

Sponsor: Representative McCABE of Skowhegan.

Co-Sponsors: Representatives COTTA of China; DUNPHY of Embden; ESPLING of New Gloucester; MAKER of Calais; MALABY of Hancock; SANDERSON of Chelsea; SHAW of Standish; and Senator WOODBURY of Cumberland

Summary: The bill amends the mining law passed last year to make it more protective of Maine's water quality and taxpayers.

Explanation: Mining could pose a major new threat to Maine's rivers, lakes, and groundwater. Mining for metals in sulfide rock deposits, where copper, silver and gold may be found, creates sulfuric acid and toxic runoff. This "acid mine drainage" pollution can devastate water quality and kill aquatic life. Of additional concern, mining companies are notorious for shutting down on short notice and leaving cleanup costs to taxpayers. This "boom and bust" mining cycle can shift huge cleanup costs onto the public. Maine citizens are still paying clean-up costs for the Callahan mine that was closed more than 40 years ago. The total cost of cleanup for that mine, borne by the public, is estimated at \$23 million and may cost substantially more.

Maine needs strong environmental safeguards for metal mining operations because we have precious waterways that must be protected, including rivers and streams that support some of the best brook trout fishing in the United States. Mining advocates claim that "new technologies" will protect Maine's water quality, but they have not identified a single sulfide mine that has been operated without polluting downstream waters.

The risks are too high to allow out-of-state mining corporations to use Maine as an experiment for unproven mining techniques. If metal mining occurs in Maine, then: 1) Mines must meet very stringent water quality standards; 2) Maine taxpayers must not be stuck with cleanup costs; 3) Mainers must be confident that a mine, if started, can be operated without polluting our environment; and 4) No mine should be approved if it requires waste treatment to continue in perpetuity.

LD 1302 addresses each of these issues. The bill has stronger protections for groundwater. It requires an independent third-party estimate for clean-up costs and ensures that this amount is placed in a trust that is available exclusively to the State for cleanup purposes. The bill prohibits the DEP from approving a mining operation permit unless the mine can be cleaned-up within 10 years of closure, thus protecting against a perpetual clean-up operation. And the bill has a common sense provision that an applicant for a mining permit must identify at least one mine that has operated without causing water pollution. Maine should not be a guinea pig for mining companies. We should know first that it can be done without harming the environment.

NRCM supports LD 1302.