

Mines have wrecked spectacular sport fisheries

January 23, 2017 [Conservation](#), [Environmental Issues](#), [Legislative News](#), [Bangor Daily News](#)

By [George Smith](#)



Macauley Lord said it best at a State House press conference outlining key environmental issues for this legislative session. Speaking about his concern over mining in Maine, Macauley said, “I can tell you that Maine has some of the best places to fish in the world. We have a high percentage of the best trout habitat left in the eastern United States and we are a destination for world-class fly fishing experiences.”

“I can’t tell you how many anglers I meet across the country who light up when I tell them I live in Maine,” said Macauley. “We are the iconic home, the last stronghold of wild brook trout the in U.S. Maine is the gateway to brook trout heaven.”

It was great to see Macauley at this event. He taught me to fly fish when I attended a fly fishing school at LL Bean where he has been an instructor for 30 years. He’s also a great writer and author.

But it was what he said next, after praising Maine’s brookies, that needs to be heard by every Maine legislator before they act on the new proposed rules for mining in our state.

“I’ve fished four rivers in the American West where mine wastes wrecked what were once spectacular sport fisheries,” reported Macauley. “All four of these fisheries are recovering but *slowly*, and only after *great* cost to taxpayers, who’ve been forced to foot the bill for their rehabilitation. As federal taxpayers, even we in this room are paying for the ongoing cleanup of those streams.

“Many, many decades after those mines closed, the pits filled up with toxic water, abandoned mining machines rusting in the rain. Those rivers and the communities they run through are still paying the cost. The cost isn’t just aesthetic. A clean river, with healthy trout, is a little economic miracle, an engine of prosperity for fishing guides, hotels and lodges, local restaurants, mom and pop stores.”

Boy, he got that right. At the last legislative session, speaking against the rules that would have made it easier to mine in Maine, I testified that brook trout are more precious than gold. That got quite a reaction from legislators and folks in the audience that day.

Macauley was speaking at a press conference hosted by the Environmental Priorities Coalition. They chose someone to speak on each of their five priority issues at this legislative session. Macauley was a good choice for their goal to “protect clean water and taxpayers from mining pollution.”

Other goals are: Ensure safe drinking water for all Maine families, Increase energy independence and create jobs with a clear solar policy, Maintain the high quality of Maine’s Public Forests as a Resource for all Maine people, and Support Maine farmers and reduce food waste. All great goals for this legislature and the people of Maine.

Maine's Environmental Priorities Coalition includes 34 environmental, conservation, and public health organizations, representing over 100,000 members. As the legislative session moves forward, I will be writing more about the bills of interest and concern to the Coalition.

Today, I want to share Macauley's entire message with you.

Macauley Lord

Remarks in support of: *An Act to Protect Maine's Clean Water and Taxpayers from Mining Pollution* January 17, 2017

My name is Macauley Lord and I live in Brunswick. I've taught fly-fishing professionally for more than 30 years. I'm a Registered Maine Guide, the author of two fly-casting books, and for ten years I had a column in a national fly-fishing magazine. I've trained fishing guides from the Indian Ocean to Argentina and across the United States. Five years ago, I received the lifetime achievement award in my field.

From this experience, I can tell you that Maine has some of the best places to fish in the world. We have a high percentage of the best trout habitat left in the eastern United States and we are a destination for world-class fly fishing experiences. I can't tell you how many anglers I meet across the country who light up when I tell them I live in Maine. We are the iconic home, the last stronghold of wild brook trout in the U.S. Maine is the gateway to brook trout heaven.

I've fished four rivers in the American West where mine wastes wrecked what were once spectacular sport fisheries. All four of these fisheries are recovering but *slowly*, and only after *great* cost to taxpayers, who've been forced to foot the bill for their rehabilitation. As federal taxpayers, even we in this room are paying for the ongoing cleanup of those streams.

Many, many decades after those mines closed, the pits filled up with toxic water, abandoned mining machines rusting in the rain, those rivers and the communities they run through are still paying the cost. The cost isn't just aesthetic. A clean river, with healthy trout, is a little economic miracle, an engine of prosperity for fishing guides, hotels and lodges, local restaurants, mom and pop stores.

I've seen too many of these streams that mine wastes turned into chemical sewers. It would be a tragedy if it happened in Maine. The stream bottom turns yellow, or orange, almost like Velveeta. The water is literally poisonous. The mayflies and stoneflies, the caddisflies and midges that trout depend on and that we imitate with our flies can't live in those places. Nothing grows in them. Nothing. And the death persists for miles downstream. This waste gets into groundwater and spreads unseen.

A very long time after these mines close, and the jobs just go somewhere else, what becomes of our brook trout? A little over twenty years ago, a friend and I fished a small pond on the upper Androscoggin drainage. It had a strong inflow and outflow, so it wasn't much more than a wide place in a stream.

We caught brookie after brookie there, and they were beautiful *and big*. I tell people that they were 16 inches, which probably means they were 15 inches. To support brook trout like that, the stream has to be nearly perfect, the way God made it about 10,000 years ago.

If there are going to be new metal mines in Maine, we need *strong* mining laws to protect our wild brook trout and to protect the local economies that these beautiful and, yes, fragile fish sustain. *Thank you.*