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Staff photo/Kathy McCarty

Group questions mining's impact on environment

By Kathy McCarty
Staff Writer

PRESQUE ISLE — Preserving Maine's waterways and wildlife was the focus of a meeting held Sept. 18 at the Knights of Columbus Hall in Presque Isle.

About 50 individuals attended the invitation-only event, which featured guest speakers Jeff Reardon of Maine Trout Unlimited and National Resource Council of Maine's staff scientist Nick Bennett.

Shelly Mountain, one of the event organizers, welcomed those in attendance and explained the purpose of the gathering.

"When I first heard about mining at Bald Mountain, I was hopeful. I have sons who need jobs. But after attending various events hosted by Irving, I wasn't reassured by the promises about drinkable water quality. At the UMPI meeting, the last speaker rushed through and there was no time left for questions," said Mountain, noting the

evening was designed for having those concerns addressed.

Reardon was the first to speak, discussing at length the effects sulfide runoff has on fish when water from mining operations flows into rivers, streams and lakes.

"Maine is to brook trout what Alaska is for salmon. There's a huge difference between Maine's lake and pond trout population and upstate New York's," said Reardon. He said mining elsewhere in the U.S., including Pennsylvania, has caused runoff to feed into waterways, seriously impacting native species, such as trout.

"Many places are still generating acid today. That occurs when sulfide deposits are exposed to oxygen and water. It causes sulfuric acid to be created. As the Ph goes down (runoff), tends to leach metals, such as manganese, aluminum, iron and others. Iron hydroxide causes the red staining you see in the slide. Aquatic life is impacted.

Low Ph and metal deposits kill vegetation too," said Reardon.

Bennett spoke next, discussing open-pit mining and the impact such mining has had over the years in various locations across the United States and Canada.

With regard to runoff, Bennett said "lower level lakes and waterways would be affected."

Referencing the proposed project at Bald Mountain, Bennett said water would drain from the site to surrounding waterways, including Clayton Lake, Carr Pond and Fish River Lake, then flow east to Portage, St. Froid and Eagle lakes.

"Once the water drops out of Eagle, it heads to Soldier Pond, Fish River Falls and the St. John River," continued Bennett.

Bennett spoke at length about open-pit mining and how Irving's plan for reverse

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SAD 1 enrollment figures up first time in five years

By Scott Mitchell Johnson

Staff Writer

148 for an increase of 27 students. Zippel Elementary School has seen a decrease of seven children bringing enroll-



Environment

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osmosis to purify the water would be too costly a process to make mining the site feasible, from an economic standpoint.

"People here can influence how this issue plays out," said Bennett. "The problem with reverse osmosis is that it takes the metal out of the water, but you still have the metal. What do you do with it?"

He discussed various other mines in the U.S., the cost of maintaining water purification systems and concerns over who would be responsible, should a company walk away once all the materials were mined.

The audience followed with questions and concerns regarding the proposed project at Bald Mountain and mining rule changes proposed in Augusta.

Rommy Haines said Irving wasn't like Blackhawk (another company in the mining busi-

ness).

"Irving has members on almost every municipal board. These are people who live here," Haines said. "To set a tone of acrimony won't necessarily work, especially for local legislators. They need to understand our concerns. They want to know personal details, from real people who live here."

Haines said "It's a different battle this time. The people opening the mine are part of our community this time."

Haines said to win, it was "not about out-sciencing."

"The reason legislation's gotten through is it's political, not scientific," he said.

Holly Umphrey, former Portage town manager, said she'd testified for Irving and wanted to hear concerns.

"I don't want to see the price tag, just can it be done — zero discharge," said Umphrey.

Reardon said "no," and that

was why there was a fight in Augusta to increase ground water quality standards.

"If you're talking a treatment plant, you're not talking zero discharge," said Reardon.

Umphrey questioned, given today's technology, why such couldn't be done. Bennett said it wasn't possible "in this environment."

Rep. Henry John Bear (of the Houlton Band of Maliseet Indians) said "We don't need to know all the science. This impacts all of us."

"From a personal perspective, I oppose it. I can't see any reason to support a mine in our traditional tribal territory. I'm prepared to take a lead role. I've been in this role many times; I'm prepared to do it again," said Bear. "Let's make decisions based on real information, not emotions."

Theresa Fowler, executive director of the Central



Staff photo/Kathy McCarry

JEFF REARDON, of Maine Trout Unlimited, speaks to a group of people about the environmental impact mining would have on area fish populations. The meeting was held at the Knights of Columbus Hall in Presque Isle.

Aroostook Chamber of Commerce, said she'd attended prior meetings on the topic of mining Bald Mountain and "never heard Irving say they were interested in a pit mine."

Fowler tried to continue but was cut off by Mountain, who told her she'd had "lots of opportunities to present your side of it" and that there were other speakers who wanted to be heard before the group had to be out of the hall that evening.

Gail Maynard, a cattle farmer from Woodland, said she feared "poisoned water would devastate local habitat."

Maynard explained she'd testified in Augusta three times already and would be willing to help others through the process if interested.

"It's scary but not difficult," said Maynard.

Dan Ennis, a member of the Tobique First Nation, in New Brunswick, was the last speaker of the evening.

"We're all part of Creation. Do you want to see it destroyed?" asked Ennis. "You have to think long-term. Speak from the heart."

"The problem with white people, they think from the head,

not the heart. You have to pay attention. You have a lot to learn. We've been trying to teach you for 500 years," said Ennis.

"I'm here to bear witness. I'll go back to my council and tell them you're doing a piss poor job but at least you're doing something," concluded Ennis.

Maine people will have a chance to speak again during a public hearing this fall in Augusta in front of the Board of Environmental Protection on Thursday, Oct. 17.

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