



Photo by Betsy Terrell

# Protect Maine's Water from Mining Pollution

## Support LD 820:

### *An Act To Protect Maine's Clean Water and Taxpayers from Mining Pollution*

**Sponsored by:** Sen. Brownie Carson

**Oppose LD 395:**  
*BEP's weak mining rules*

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Clean water is vital to Maine's economy and way of life.  
Mining puts our environment and jobs at risk.

## Mining Rules Back for Third Time

In 2014 and 2015, thanks to public outcry statewide, the Maine Legislature overwhelmingly defeated bad mining rules that would have allowed dangerous mines near some of Maine's most treasured places, including Moosehead Lake, Cobscook Bay, and the Fish River in Aroostook County, known for its brook trout fishery.

- Mining for copper and other metals in sulfide deposits can create sulfuric acid; this acid mine drainage can pollute rivers, streams, coastal areas, and groundwater. It can kill aquatic wildlife.
- Mining companies often cause major environmental problems and then declare bankruptcy, leaving taxpayers to pay for cleanup.
- The Callahan mine in Hancock County closed more than 40 years ago, yet it continues to contaminate the surrounding environment and cost Maine taxpayers about \$1 million per year—and the biggest part of the cleanup effort has yet to begin.

## NRCM Opposes Weak Mining Rules (LD 395) and Supports LD 820

NRCM opposes LD 395, the bill that would enact weak mining rules passed by the Maine Board of Environmental Protection. NRCM supports LD 820, "An Act to Protect Maine's Clean Water and Taxpayers from Mining Pollution," which would amend the 2012 mining law to require strong new mining protections and a rewrite of the weak rules. LD 820 would:

- Ban mining in, on, and under floodplains, public lands, rivers, lakes, and coastal waters.
- Require mining companies to set aside enough upfront funds to cover major environmental disasters, protecting taxpayers from cleanup costs.
- Limit groundwater pollution to levels meaningfully below what is currently allowed by law.

## Here are the biggest problems with LD 395 (BEP's weak mining rules) and what LD 820 does to address these issues. LD 395 would:

- **Allow mining in, on, and under Maine's spectacular Public Reserved Lands such as Deboullie, Nahmakanta, and Telos.** *LD 820 would ban mining on all State-owned lands.*
- **Leave Maine taxpayers on the hook for mining disasters, which happen far too often.** Maine should not allow mining by any company that isn't willing to pay upfront for the cost of a potential disaster. Mining disasters frequently cost hundreds of millions of dollars to clean up, and companies often go bankrupt, leaving taxpayers with the bill. Maine taxpayers are still paying to clean up the Callahan mine in Brooksville, which closed in 1972. The cleanup is nowhere near complete, and the site is still contaminating the surrounding waters and fish. Maine cannot afford this kind of problem again.

*LD 820 would require a qualified third party to estimate the cost of a worst-case mining disaster. It would also require mining companies to put that amount of money into a trust that the State can access in case of a disaster. This will ensure mining companies pay to clean up their messes, not Maine taxpayers.*

- **Allow even the most hazardous parts of mines—such as waste rock piles, mine pits, and processing facilities—in floodplains and flood hazard areas.** Mining is one of the most dangerous industrial activities. Allowing mines in areas vulnerable to flooding only increases the dangers of mining, and it makes no sense. *LD 820 would ban this.*
- **Allow “wet mine units” to store acid-generating mining waste.** The 2017 rules do not clearly define “wet mine waste units,” but they put no limit on their size. DEP has admitted “wet mine waste units” would be similar to tailings impoundments. Tailings impoundments are extremely dangerous. Maine should not allow them or anything like them. Eighty percent of tailings impoundment dam failures occur during the active life of mines, not in some distant future. Tailings dam failures also happen at modern mines, such as the Mount Polley mine in British Columbia. *LD 820 does not address this issue, but NRCM will push for new rules to require only dry mining waste management and ban tailings impoundments and “wet mine waste units.”*
- **Allow open-pit mines.** Open-pit mines generate about ten times more waste than underground mines and are a particularly bad idea in a wet state like Maine. *LD 820 does not address this issue, but NRCM will push for a ban on open-pit mines in new mining rules.*



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