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NEWS RELEASE

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Vos and Darling Want To Privatize Mine Permit Review

Madison: The Sierra Club – John Muir Chapter has reviewed the compromise talking points proposed by Rep. Vos and Sen. Darling for AB 426/SB 488, the Open Pit Strip Mine Bill and has the following statement: “This is nothing more than a last ditch effort to force unacceptable open pit strip mine on northern Wisconsin. Legislators and the public should not be fooled by last minute shabby window dressing on a failed bill.” said Dave Blouin, Sierra Club Mining Committee Chair.

Rep. Vos and Sen. Darling have proposed to make the bill even worse in two ways: First, by inserting a “poison pill” by requiring DNR refund all costs for review of a permit application if the permit is not issued in 360 days. Second, they propose to privatize the preparation of the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) to an outside third party to be chosen by competitive bidding. The EIS is designed to be the objective scientific document used to both determine impacts from proposals and as the basis for permitting decisions.

“Rep. Vos and Sen. Darling want to outsource the most important document related to mine permitting – the EIS - to the lowest bidder, then eliminate oversight of the EIS by prohibiting contested case hearings, and hold the entire process hostage by making DNR return all permitting costs to the company if they’re not awarded a permit. The result would be a mine permit based on possibly fraudulent or false information with no way for the state or the public to determine its accuracy. Rep. Vos and Sen. Darling are demonstrating unequivocally that they value the demands of private mining companies over the state’s responsibilities to protect public resources,” said Blouin.

The talking points (if turned into amendments) leave in place the most objectionable and destructive elements of the bill written by Gogebic Taconite, notably:

- Removal of all Contested Case hearings designed to ensure accountability of mining company officials and review scientific decisions.
- Exemptions for iron mining from dumping wastes into sensitive wetlands.
- Requiring the DNR to approve waste disposal sites that will likely cause groundwater and surface water impacts.
- Allowing unlimited drawdown of groundwater, lakes, and streams.
- The exemption for iron mining from the mining moratorium law on sulfide mining even if sulfides are found.
- Maintaining the provision that new iron mining law supersede all other environmental law, unlike any other industry in Wisconsin.

The Sierra Club thanks Senators Schultz and Jauch for their continued leadership on this issue and their respect for open and transparent process when considering potential iron mining in the Bad River watershed.

As Sen. Schultz said Wednesday when reaffirming his opposition to AB 426/SB 488, "...we do our best when we listen to those we represent and not allow out of state special interests to do our thinking for us." The Sierra Club has consistently opposed any changes to existing environmental regulations for mining as there is no scientific basis for reducing protection.

The Open Pit Strip Mine bill is now scheduled for hearing in Executive Session by the Joint Finance Committee at 10 AM, Monday, March 5, 2012, in room 412 East, State Capitol.

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Founded in 1892 by John Muir, the Sierra Club is America's oldest, largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization. The Sierra Club's mission is to explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth; to practice and promote the responsible use of the earth's ecosystems and resources; to educate and enlist humanity to protect and restore the quality of the natural and human environment; and to use all lawful means to carry out those objectives. The Sierra Club – John Muir Chapter is made up of 15,000 members and supporters working to promote clean energy and protect water resources in Wisconsin.