

SUPPORT

LD 750 – An Act To Allow Regulated Metal Mining in Maine

Sponsor: Representative CHAPMAN of Brooksville

Cosponsors: Representative CHIPMAN of Portland and Senator GRATWICK of Penobscot

Summary: This bill proposes a moratorium on mining in Maine until the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) develops and the Legislature approves mining rules that are protective of the environment.

Explanation: Metal mining is a major threat to Maine’s clean water. Mining in sulfide deposits, the kind of deposits here in Maine, creates sulfuric acid and toxic, heavy-metal-laden runoff. This “acid mine drainage” pollution can devastate water quality and kill aquatic life. Even modern mines cause major environmental disasters. This happened in August 2014 at the Mt. Polley Mine in British Columbia. The mine opened in 1997, but the tailings dam failed due to a design flaw and released *billions* of gallons of mining waste into pristine streams and lakes. Cleanup costs for the Mt. Polley disaster could reach \$400 million, money the mining company doesn’t have. Taxpayers often get stuck with the clean-up cost for mining disasters. Maine taxpayers continue to pay cleanup costs more than 40 years after the Callahan Mine closed in Brooksville. We’ve spent more than \$8 million for the Callahan cleanup, including \$1.6 million in the Governor’s current budget. And the biggest part of the cleanup hasn’t even started.

Maine needs strong mining rules to protect our clean water. Our rivers, streams and ponds 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 failed to identify what these new technologies are. That’s because they don’t exist. The Mt. Polley disaster is proof of that.

LD 750 would reject the current proposed mining rules (LD 146) and direct the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) to come back with better rules in 2017. Some of the key provisions in LD 750 that NRCM supports are:

- The requirement that all mining areas be left in or returned to a geologically stable condition following remediation and closure;
- The requirement that the permittee demonstrate that the environmental quality and security of the site will be protected through the use of proven technologies and best available practices, and require the use of these technologies and practices as a permit condition;
- The requirement that all remediation costs related to a mining area are paid by the permittee and not by the State; and
- The requirement that the financial assurance method approved for and financial assurance amount required for a permittee be determined by an independent 3rd-party expert with a background in mining.

NRCM believes protective rules would require some additional provisions, such as protections for Maine’s public lands, but LD 750 is a good step in the right direction.

NRCM supports LD 750.