

## **Remarks by Dan Kusnierz upon receiving his 2024 Conservation Leadership Award**

Thank you to NRCM and the people that chose to honor me with this Conservation Leadership Award. Congratulations to the other recipients who are being honored tonight for their leadership and advocacy to reduce pollution and conserve Maine's environment for our future and for our children. We live in a special place that sometimes people take for granted. I would especially like to applaud MaryAlice Mowry for her tireless efforts to organize and educate people in the Patten area about the threats from the proposed Wolfden mine at Pickett Mountain. I admire the strength of this sweet woman for standing up against attacks and adversity that she faced from foreign company's promises of prosperity to her neighbors.

I reflect on a phone call from Nick Bennett, alerting the Penobscot Nation about a mine being proposed in an area of great importance to the tribe. When he asked if I would be willing to present in a webinar about the mine, I felt ill-prepared and overwhelmed for the battle that would ensue. I knew very little about mining but had visited metallic mineral mines in other parts of the country and saw the devastating environmental effects on lands and waters in Indian Country. The Penobscot River, homeland to the Penobscot Nation, was showing remarkable recovery after improvements in water quality, removal of dams, and other restoration efforts. We could not let a poorly conceived and planned mine happen in the head waters of the Penobscot watershed. And I am thrilled to say that together we were able to stop it!

While I am being honored tonight for my role in helping to defeat the proposed Wolfden mine, there are many people and groups that deserve recognition and thanks. To the Penobscot people who entrust me with the honor of protecting their sacred waters. To Nick Bennett, who worked in the background, but truly led the effort. To our awesome intervenor team of NRCM, HBMI, PIN, CLF and Maine Audubon represented by Aaron Bloom and his legal team at Earth Justice, with additional legal expertise of Sean Mahoney and Peter Brann. I am proud to have been part of this talented and dedicated group. To our team of expert witnesses. To the Wabanaki people that showed up and spoke passionately about the importance of the lands and waters to their culture and well-being. To the people that supported their Wabanaki neighbors. To all the legislators, guides, businesses, youth, and individuals from near and far that turned out to say that this mine was not acceptable for this precious area of Maine. Your voices mattered and were heard! And ultimately thank you to the LUPC who voted to deny Wolfden's petition.

In closing, it was a wild ride. There were so many times along the way when it seemed like things were going against us. Even though it seemed like there was overwhelming opposition to the mine, new obstacles that we could not have anticipated kept popping up, one after another. But our team persevered and Maine's environment was victorious.