

Permit to Mine – Wetlands

Wetlands are lands with distinct ecosystems saturated with water, either permanently or seasonally, and can be found in and around the proposed NorthMet Mining Project area. Most wetlands in this area are regulated and protected under Section 404 of the federal Clean Water Act, which is administered by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, and/or the State of Minnesota's Wetlands Conservation Act. Under state law, the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) is charged with regulating wetland impacts and mitigation proposed as part of an application for a permit to mine.

How would the NorthMet Mining Project affect wetlands?

The NorthMet Mining Project proposes impacts to 930.2 acres of direct and fragmented wetlands. Activities that would directly impact wetlands include filling and excavation within the boundaries of a wetland. Fragmented wetlands are remnants of a directly impacted wetland. Monitoring would be conducted to determine if indirect wetland impacts occur from changes such as watershed areas, stream flow, or groundwater drawdown.

How were the project's wetland impacts determined?

Wetland types and acreages were identified during wetland delineation. Direct impacts were determined by overlaying the project's construction and operations on the mapped wetlands to determine the wetland areas that would be permanently lost.

What would be done to avoid or minimize these impacts?

PolyMet proposes to avoid and minimize wetland impacts by optimizing the placement of mining features such as the mine pits, waste rock and overburden stockpiles, haul roads, water management systems, and supporting infrastructure. Additionally, the processing plant and the transportation and utility corridor would be located on land previously used for industrial purposes. This reuse would avoid the need to disturb additional lands (including wetlands) and would further reduce environmental effects.

What is proposed to mitigate wetland impacts?

PolyMet is proposing to replace direct and fragmented wetland impacts using wetland bank credits. PolyMet's Wetlands Conservation Act application proposes a 1:1 ratio utilizing credits from within the same major watershed. Wetlands not directly impacted by the proposed project would be monitored for potential indirect impacts. If any indirect impacts are identified, alternatives to reduce and rectify wetland impacts would be evaluated. If indirect wetland impacts cannot be avoided, additional mitigation would be required by the DNR.

Why have the three wetland mitigation sites (Aitkin, Hinckley, and Zim) been removed from the project?

Since the original permit to mine application in November 2016, PolyMet has proposed to purchase wetland bank credits from within the same watershed as the proposed project. PolyMet has proposed to purchase these credits rather than developing its own mitigation sites (some of which were outside the watershed). These credits are for wetlands restored by a third party and monitored through the wetland banking process.

Would wetlands be restored at the site when mining is complete?

After the mine closes, PolyMet would be required to reclaim the NorthMet mining area. Some areas at the mine site would be restored as wetlands. These wetlands would be in addition to those required for mitigation and would be of a type appropriate to the future landscape.