



Cultural Resources

Within the context of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA), “cultural resources” typically refers to identified historic properties (considered under the National Historic Preservation Act) and tribal resources. From a broader context, cultural resources encompass a wide range of resources associated with the way people interact with the surrounding natural and physical environment. A NEPA environmental review must address the effects that a project would have on cultural resources. A specific prescribed method is used to identify and consider all types of cultural resources and balance the need for development with the need to protect cultural resources.

The Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) for the NorthMet Mining Project and Land Exchange looks at how the project would affect historic properties and cultural resources important to the Ojibwe people of northeastern Minnesota — including the Bois Forte, Fond du Lac, and Grand Portage Bands of Chippewa (the Bands).

How could the NorthMet Mining Project affect cultural resources?

The proposed project would primarily affect historic and cultural resources during construction and operations, through excavation, filling, earth-moving, and other activities that could result in access restrictions, visual obstructions, noise, vibration, and dust.

Historic and cultural resources identified within or near the project site include:

- The Sugarbush (maple sugar camp site) that is not located within the project footprint area, which would not be affected;
- A segment of the *Mesabe Widjiu* (or Laurentian Divide, regarded as a sacred place to the Ojibwe people) that occurs within the project area, which would be affected;
- A segment of the Beaver Bay to Lake Vermilion Trail that occurs within the project footprint area, which would be affected;
- The Erie Mining Company Railroad Mine and Plant Track that does not occur within the project footprint area, which would not be affected; and
- The Erie Mining Company Concentrator Building, which would be affected through its proposed refurbishment and use.

The Project area is also located on land that was ceded to the United States by the Bands under the 1854 Treaty. As part of the Treaty, the Bands reserved the right to hunt, fish, and gather on these lands. Some resources — such as fish, plant, and animal species — may be affected by the project, the degree to which in a cultural resource context is unknown.

How were the effects determined?

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and U.S. Forest Service have consulted with the Bands and the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to determine places near the project area that could be eligible for listing in the National Register for Historic Places (NRHP). Places that were not eligible for the NRHP were considered but eliminated from further evaluation in the Supplemental Draft EIS.

To determine the effects on other culturally important resources in the 1854 Ceded Territory, the Bands conducted interviews with tribal elders, though only the interviews with Bois Forte elders were made available for inclusion in the SDEIS.

The determinations of effect are preliminary and will be refined through continued consultation with the Bands and the SHPO.

What would be done to avoid or minimize these effects?

PolyMet would avoid or minimize effects by moving project-related activities away from cultural resources or monitoring the effects of activities occurring near these resources. Additional mitigations could include study, dissemination, and interpretation of historic properties outside of the proposed project area. Once final determinations of effects are complete, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and U.S. Forest Service would consult with the Bands and the SHPO to identify ways to avoid, minimize, or mitigate effects.

For more information about how cultural resources would be affected by the NorthMet Mining Project and Land Exchange, see the Executive Summary, Sections 4.2.9 and 4.3.9 (Affected Environment, Cultural Resources), Sections 5.2.9 and 5.3.9 (Environmental Consequences, Cultural Resources), and Chapter 6 (Cumulative Effects) of the SDEIS. Also, refer to additional Fact Sheets about the NorthMet Mining Project and Land Exchange SDEIS:

- 1. What is the Environmental Review Process?**
- 2. Effective Commenting**
- 3. A Guide to the SDEIS Document**
- 4. What's Changed Since the DEIS?**
- 5. Project & Land Exchange Overview**
- 6. Land Exchange**
- 7. Reclamation and Financial Assurance**
- 8. Water Quality**
- 9. Wetlands**
- 10. Air Quality**
- 11. Wild Rice**
- 12. Mercury**
- 13. Threatened & Endangered Species**
- 14. Cumulative Effects**
- 15. Cultural Resources**
- 16. Water Quantity**