

Identification of Historic Properties of
Traditional Religious and Cultural Significance to
The Bois Forte Band in the PolyMet NorthMet Project
Area of Potential Effect

By
William R. Latady

With Contributions By
Marybelle Isham

Bois Forte Tribal Historic Preservation Office
1500 Bois Forte Road
Tower, MN 55790

January 2011

Prepared for

PolyMet Mining Inc.
P.O. Box 475 County Road 666
Hoyt Lakes, MN 55750

Introduction

This report presents the results of a survey to identify historic properties of religious and cultural significance to Indian tribes within the PolyMet NorthMet project Area of Potential Effect (APE), evaluate whether adverse impacts to properties would occur as a result of the proposed mining, and if necessary, prepare and execute a plan to mitigate adverse impacts. The survey consisted of conducting interviews with tribal elders to document the presence of historic properties of religious and cultural significance.

Obtaining information on historic properties of religious and cultural significance to Indian tribes is complex. Sharing information on resources that comprise cultural identity with outsiders is carefully considered by tribal members because history has shown the information may be misused and/or exploited at the expense of the individual, tribe or resource. In some instances it is taboo to discuss activities with others and prohibited for another to ask. This methodological and sampling problem results in the under-representation of historic properties of religious and cultural significance to Indian tribes in resource inventories.

In an effort to comply with federal regulations to identify and document historic properties of traditional religious and cultural significance to Tribes the Bois Forte Tribal Historic Preservation Office (THPO) proposed to document these resources. The proposal grew out of consultation between the Ojibwe Bands and the US Army Corps of Engineers.

Project Setting

The proposed project area is located on the southern flank of the Mesabi Iron Range in St Louis County near the headwaters of the Partridge and Embarrass River watersheds. The area is characterized by extensive wetlands overlying the relatively thin surface tills closely underlain by bedrock. Uplands support mixed pine - hardwood (including maple) forest and black spruce – jack pine woodlands occur in the lowlands in addition to aspen birch forests, alder swamps and low shrub fens.

The area supports species that are significant to the Bands and include moose, deer, grouse and several furbearing taxa. Water bodies including Trimble Creek, the Partridge and Embarrass Rivers, Colby Lake and Whitewater Reservoir contain a variety of fish including northern and walleye pike, in addition to wild rice, which are also of concern.

Methodology

Over two dozen elders were contacted following an initial letter to all elders explaining that the Bois Forte THPO was interested in talking with anyone who was willing to share knowledge or information about the project area. Eleven elders contacted the THPO and eight provided at least some information about the project area. In addition, two non-Band members, Becky Gawboy

and Howard Heath, provided information about Bois Forte cultural activities. Ms. Gawboy is married to Jim Gawboy and Mr. Heath is acquainted with the interviewer, Marybelle Isham. Howard Heath was a High School teacher in Aurora, Minnesota and has studied the history of northeastern Minnesota.

During June, July and August, 2010 the Bois Forte Tribal Historic Preservation Office conducted interviews of Bois Forte Band members with knowledge of the project area. The actual interviews were carried out by an elder, Marybelle Isham, who volunteered to be involved in the project. The interviews were conducted at the Heritage Center or individuals' homes and recorded when allowed. Six questions were asked during the course of the interview and appear in Table 1.

In addition to interviews, the THPO reviewed the archives at the Bois Forte Heritage Museum and asked Band members about any photographs or written documentation in their possession. One photograph of three people at a sugar camp, identified as being near the Spring Mine, occurred in a collection belonging to Alex Pete. Unfortunately, the photograph was not found until after Mr. Pete's passing in early December 2010, and there is little additional information beyond the description on the reverse side of the print.

Table 1. Interview Questions.

- | |
|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Do you know of trails or routes that passed through the area; especially near the Laurentian Divide that may have been routes leading to sacred places or links?2. Can you point out areas on the map that were used for hunting or fishing?3. Can you show areas on the map that were used for cultural activities such as sugar bushing or gathering bark?4. Do you know of any sacred areas where ceremonies were held or plants gathered for medicine?<ul style="list-style-type: none">- How do you remember these taking place or changing over time?5. Do you remember stories or oral histories of the area?6. Do you recall traditional names of lakes, streams, outcrops, hills, important views? |
|---|

Results

All eight of the elders provided some information about the project area and recalled general use of the area by family or Band members. Four interviewees mentioned trails that were used for hunting, fishing and plant gathering. One elder recalled being in the area as an independent logger, but did not mention exercising usufructuary rights while there or by others. Only one elder, Jim Gawboy described a specific trail, the Thunderbird Trail which traverses the Laurentian Divide. Mr. Gawboy also notes that when trains became available, they were utilized by Band members for access to traditional use areas. Robert Boshey also mentions that trains were used by Band members. This information suggests that at least some traditional means of

access were used less frequently once other means of transportation became available and may help explain the overall lack of information about trail location and specific function.

Subsistence activities; hunting, fishing or plant gathering, were mentioned by seven of the people interviewed. They recalled use of the area by relatives, and occasionally the type of resource, (wild rice, maple sugar, berries, and birch bark), although little information on location was provided. Only one elder, Jim Gawboy, provided a specific location for a cultural activity, in this case a sugar camp utilized by his parents, which was “across the lake from Giants Ridge.”

Other evidence for practicing usufructuary rights within the project area occurs as a black and white print. The photograph is small (less than 3 inches by 2 inches) and features three people in a hardwood forest. The individuals are standing in front of an arbor and holding items associated with making maple sugar. The caption on the reverse, printed in block letters with a pencil reads “MA & PA & ME SUGAR MAKING IN SPRING MINE MESABA, MINN, 1942.” The Bois Forte THPO has yet to identify the individuals in the photograph. However, evidence of a sugar camp within the present PolyMet Mine property is well known to mine personnel and has been visited by the Bois Forte THPO staff and the US Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Archaeologist, Brad Johnson. Artifacts on the site surface date from the late 19th century through at the 1940’s. The camp is close to the old Spring Mine and apparently is the location of the sugar bush referred to on the back of the photograph.

The topic of sacred or ceremonial areas was addressed by three Band members and Becky Gawboy. Not surprisingly, the subject of graves was mentioned in only the most general terms and by only one person; Spiritual Advisor, Ken Boney. Burials are an extremely sensitive issue and specific information on grave locations would only be revealed if the informant was certain that the knowledge would not be exploited and/or lead to desecration of the graves. The other types of sacred or ceremonial activities mentioned were pow-wows and spiritual journeys. Pow-wows were not known to occur within the project area, only to the north in the vicinity of Tower, Minnesota.

Spiritual journeys are associated with the Thunderbird Trail which traverses the Laurentian Divide, eventually leading to Thunder Bay and Thunder Mountain in Canada. The Trail is used for both physical and metaphysical journeys and has a corporeal and spiritual beginning and ending. Offerings occurring along the way represent a substantive acknowledgement of the trails’ spiritual power.

Concern over mining in the 1854 ceded territory in general and the PolyMet Mine specifically became apparent during the course of the interviews. Five people expressed alarm ranging from apprehension to outrage. Warner Wirta expressed his dismay in both the interview and an email to the Deputy THPO, Bill Latady:

“I have been in contact with State of Minnesota Rep. Roger Reinart and he talks about his support for the "Minnesota Security bond 'if accidental discharge of Sulfates, or other toxic residue into any Steam, Lakes, Lowlands of N.E. Minnesota by PolyMet mining operation, the State of Minnesota will be protected.' These poisons will last up to 2,000 years. How about the little people like me that want to live here? How about Indian

Spiritual-Culture which revolves around what happens in the Streams, rivers, Lakes, Lowland Wild Rice? These things are practiced in Indian Spiritual-Culture. PolyMet is trying to lobby the MPCA into relaxing their sulfate standard of 10mg/l. This will give them a greater discharge level of sulfate pollution they can dump into the rivers, streams, lakes and lowlands in northeastern Minnesota. PolyMet has already said some toxic sulfates and other toxic residues will escape into streams, rivers, lakes and lowlands due to mining of heavy metals. This is a real cover-up. This is a real slap in the face of Minnesota Chippewa Indian Spiritual-Culture. They must not get by with this. When the new 8th District Congressman Chip Cravaavak states PolyMet can mine for Heavy metals "for National security reasons" it is like kicking Indian people in the head when they are down. It's insulting!

How about the leeching of these caustic metals that will get into the fresh water tables of local towns, rural people who have selected to live there? How can the multi-million dollar casinos and tourist trade in this region be protected from this developing threat?"

Other respondents were less emphatic, but no less concerned and think the beauty of the area will be impacted no less than usufructuary resources. Future generations will not have the opportunity to practice time-honored cultural activities because of the potential for harm to the environment and by extension the cultural resources, i.e. wild rice, maple syrup/sugar, medicinal plants and fish, to name a few.

Discussion

The survey of Band members who may have knowledge of historic use of cultural resources within the APE of the proposed PolyMet NorthMet Mine provided general information about the area and how usufructuary rights were practiced. The THPO had hoped to have the names of families with particular ties to the area, but overall there is little extant information, at least among the elders who were contacted. Undoubtedly, had we been able to interview elders a generation or two prior to this one there would have been considerably more information.

The single exception was finding the photograph featuring a family at the Spring Mine Sugar Camp. Clearly, Band members were obtaining maple sugar in the area where the mine is located in the early 1940's and probably continued to do so until they were effectively "locked out" of the area with the onset of taconite mining operations in the 1950's. Artifacts at the sugar camp indicate it was in use from at least the late 19th century through the 1940's. The tie to the Bois Forte Band will be strengthened once the people in the photograph are identified. The Bois Forte THPO considers the Spring Creek Mine sugar camp a culturally significant property that will require further work to fully identify and record its history.

Nonetheless, the interviewees identified a number of activities that occurred in the area ranging from subsistence to spiritual. Band members identified medicinal plant gathering, wild ricing, hunting and fishing as having occurred within the APE by relatives, other Band members,

if not themselves. Sacred/Spiritual activities were also identified, including burials and the Thunderbird Trail. The locations of graves were described as being associated with where people lived.

There are also concerns about the effects that the PolyMet Mine will have on the ability of Band members to pursue their usufructuary rights within the ceded territory. Fears that caustic chemicals used in the copper nickel extraction process could leak into the ground and ultimately affect the groundwater are not without merit. In addition, possible changes in regulatory statutes that would relax standards for sulfates in groundwater and affect lakes, rivers and streams would permit added pollution to waters used for wild rice, fishing and hunting. Marybelle Isham nicely summarizes the unease expressed by many Band members in regards to the proposed mining activities:

“To reiterate the results of the interviews and heartfelt information I received from the people about the area around Hoyt Lakes, there are rivers with wild rice and woods where medicinal plants grow. Unfortunately there is not an exact location where any particular Band member collected flowers, plants, roots or bark, as only the person making the medicine knew the whereabouts of the plant needed. The area still supports cranberries, blueberries and trees with barks that was (and still is) used for illness. In addition, the pristine waters, fish, and natural habitat for fur bearing animals and birds will be affected by the mine. Our thoughts are on the generations to come and the generation that is here now.”

The distress over the loss of traditional lifeways within the 1854 Ceded Territory is seen as not only affecting present generations, but future ones. It is the responsibility of living Band members to make decisions that will guarantee that seven generations in the future will have the wherewithal to not only survive, but prosper. If Minnesota environmental standards are relaxed, increases of chemicals in surface water will affect groundwater as they are inseparable. Polluting either will affect not only water, but every living organism in the vicinity and downstream. Once this happens, it is only a short time before organisms which people depend upon such as wild rice, fish and game animals are negatively affected and retaining usufructuary rights to hunt, fish and gather will be a moot point.

Appendix I

Polymet Cultural Survey

By

Marybelle Isham

Introduction

The purpose of the project was to interview Band members concerning their use of the Polymet Mining area through exercising their treaty rights to hunt, fish and gather within the 1854 Ceded Territory. The two main considerations guiding these interviews were:

- Did you, family or anyone you know visit the Polymet Mining area (near Hoyt Lakes), including the Embarrass River and Upper Partridge River to hunt, fish, gather medicine, pick rice, or have a maple sugar camp?
- Interview Band members about their thoughts on the proposed Polymet Mine and its potential impacts to the area and on Band members exercising Treaty Rights within 1854 Ceded Territory.

These considerations were used to generate six questions that were asked during the course of the interviews:

1. Do you know of trails or routes that passed through the area; especially near the Laurentian Divide that may have been routes leading to sacred places or links?
2. Can you point out areas on the map that were used for hunting or fishing?
3. Can you show areas on the map that were used for cultural activities such as sugar bushing or gathering bark?
4. Do you know of any sacred areas where ceremonies were held or plants gathered for medicine?
-How do you remember these taking place or changing over time?
5. Do you remember stories or oral histories of the area?
6. Do you recall traditional names of lakes, streams, outcrops, hills, important views?

Interviews

Elder Band members: Phyllis and Bobby Boshey:

Phyllis was born at Nett Lake and her mother was born at Pelican Lake. Her father was born at Namakan Lake. Bobby was born at Burnside Lake, as was his father Robert Boshey, his mother's name was Jenny Pete.

They reported that wild rice was harvested in the area of Hoyt Lakes, an area called the Seven lakes a part of the St. Louis River. There were portages to the lake, they also remembered railroad tracks. Another lake was where Phyllis' great grandparents riced, called Birch Lake. They lived nearby at White Iron. Maple sugar camps in that area were at Eagle's Nest and Mud Creek.

Elder Band member: Clifford Sam

This interview was conducted in Virginia, MN at Clifford Sam's residence. He grew up outside of Tower, Minnesota with his parents David Sam, Jr. and mother Emma, one brother and one sister. Clifford did some logging in the Hoyt Lakes area, strip cutting around the mine as an independent logger.

The Laurentian Divide is a sacred place where we bring tobacco to honor our spirituality. Clifford stated that the woodland area should be kept the way it is. When they start digging into the earth for various minerals the beauty of the land is taken away. He also recognizes that it's hard to combat large corporations and companies that have the money, power and lawyers to back their play. But we have to think of future generations.

Elder Band member: Knute Grave lives in Virginia, Minnesota.

He is the son of Nels Grave and Evelyn Wein. Knute stated that he knew some stories that his parents told of how most of the summer was spent gathering food for the winter, from making maple sugar, picking berries, and birch bark. He knows of some trails and passage ways in the area in question that were used for travel to pick wild rice. The mines are taking away the beauty of the land leaving big piles of earth, taking away the trees and waterways, disturbing protected land.

Spiritual Advisor for Nett Lake Reservation: Kenneth Boney

He was born and raised in Nett Lake. He stated that long ago in the Hoyt Lakes area hunting and trapping occurred in that area. He didn't think people stayed there very long, only to accomplish their purpose. He imagines that if people died there, they would be buried there, so there must be graves. When asked about trails he said that he had heard there were trails, probably well traveled and maintained. He also thinks that other tribes, the Cree and Sioux, used the area and probably used different medicinal plants growing in that area. When asked about heavy metal mining playing a role in the bands future, Mr. Boney stated that mining is bound to

have some effect on everything really, where they dump their tailings which will affect the drinking water. It may not happen right away, but sooner or later it will.

Bois Forte Elder: Raymond Boshey, Vermillion Reservation

His parents were Thomas and Josephine Boshey and he recalls being taken out of school for a week and would board a train from Tower to the Embarrass area. There they would walk up a hill to where they made a maple sugar camp. He recalls that the entire area was one solid ledge. He was not clear if the medicinal plants his dad used were from that area or their uses.

Bois Forte Elder: Warner B. Wirta

He resides in Duluth, MN with his wife Martha and grew up in Embarrass where he lived with his parents, Samuel Victor Wirta and Clara his mother. Clara was born at Jack Fish Bay on Basswood Lake. The area southeast of Embarrass has a creek and river system and throughout this vicinity there are cranberry bogs and wild rice beds. The Laurentian Divide divides the water system; the rivers flow in two directions. On the northern side of the Divide the streams flow north to Hudson Bay. South of the Laurentian Highland the rivers flow south. The Embarrass River flows south into the St Louis River which empties into Lake Superior. Because of the sandy loam soil that characterizes the area, there are a lot of blueberry patches, the natives from Vermillion picked blueberries in that area. Mr. Wirta recalls pow-wows held at Big Rice Lake and Little Rice Lake, near Tower, where there was an abundance of wild rice.

Mr. Wirta stated that he is a member of the Indian community of Duluth, Minnesota and attended a meeting on November 4, 2010 at the MPCA, concerning ricing in Minnesota. He is very concerned that PolyMet Mining Corporation is lobbying MPCA to increase the 10mg/L sulfide standard thus permitting an increase of sulfide discharges into the rivers, lakes and bogs. He is worried that PolyMet will get the green light to discharge greater amounts of sulfides and other pollutants into the pristine rivers, lakes and bog system. This will destroy the remaining wild rice, threatening ricers and Indian culture. He thinks that the MPCA should tighten the standard and does not want any heavy metal mining taking place in Minnesota.

Bois Forte Elder: Jim Gawboy,

He and his wife Becky live in Tower, Minnesota. Jim spoke of the members of his family. Concerning this project, he recalls the family moved according to the seasons of harvesting. The family would go up the Pike River, then the Embarrass River and make maple sugar on the hills in the area roughly across the lake from what is now Giants Ridge. Each family had a little camp. Later when the railroad tracks were put in, the family would catch the train in Tower and on the return trip needed only to wave a cloth and the train would stop.

He spoke about the Thunderbird Trail, which is located where Hwy 53 crosses the Laurentian Divide, and follows the ridge all the way to Thunder Bay to Thunder Mountain. The Thunderbird Trail is hard to describe, it is a spiritual path which the Thunderbird uses, and only

those who really want to see the Thunderbird regard it as a sacred place, and a place to leave offerings, and tobacco.

Becky Gawboy stated that her knowledge of the Thunderbird Trail was taught to her by elders from Grand Portage and Nett Lake. The story was that the Spiritual Power of all of us here comes through the Thunderbird. This is an important and powerful trail that has to be guarded and protected, because there are many gifts that Indian people, indeed all people, still need. Traditional plants grow everywhere, some only in certain soils, and weather conditions, roots, bark, and even flowers are still used medicinally for illnesses.

Summary

My name is Marybelle Connor Isham, I am an elder from the Bois Forte Nett Lake Reservation and a daughter of Lawrence and Ida Connor. I was born and raised on the reservation.

To sum up the information received from people who were interviewed. I will quote from the interview of Howard Heath of Hoyt Lakes. Mr. Heath is not a Band member, but taught high school in Orr and has been fascinated with the history of NE Minnesota for years. "The treaty of 1854, September 30, ceded the lands for hunting, fishing, and gathering. A portion of this land runs right through the area in question. In T60N, R13W, an Indian trail from Lake Vermillion to Beaver Bay crosses the upper Partridge River. There is more information on how the trail splits going in other directions. On present day maps the Tomahawk Trail (gravel road) goes from Babbitt to Hoyt Lakes, through Skibo. The road goes through some pretty wild country, (where I'm sure medicinal plants are well and, thriving) the Dunka River and numerous creeks are crossed by the gravel road. On both sides of the road, deer, wolves and moose, use and live in this area."

To reiterate the results of the interviews and heartfelt information I received from the people about the area around Hoyt Lakes, there are rivers with wild rice and woods where medicinal plants grow. Unfortunately there is not an exact location where any particular Band member collected flowers, plants, roots or bark, as only the person making the medicine knew the whereabouts of the plant needed. The area still supports cranberries, blueberries and trees with barks that was (and still is) used for illness. In addition, the pristine waters, fish, and natural habitat for fur bearing animals and birds will be affected by the mine. Our thoughts are on the generations to come and the generation that is here now.