



## Environmental Groups Win Modest Improvements to Wisconsin's Metallic Mining Rules

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**Madison, WI**—Environmental groups say changes to Wisconsin's sulfide mining regulations represent modest improvements after the Natural Resources Board (NRB) voted today to approve the new rules. A 2017 bill passed by the state legislature weakened mining laws and prompted the Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to undertake the process of updating the rules. While the 2017 law constrained DNR's discretion in the recent rulemaking process, a coalition of environmental organizations successfully advocated for changes that added clarity and strengthened environmental protections.

Midwest Environmental Advocates attorney Rob Lundberg testified at Natural Resources Board meetings in December and January on behalf of 10 environmental organizations that had submitted [joint comments](#) to the DNR on a draft version of the rules. In response, DNR clarified language related to the bulk sampling process and the protection of sensitive areas. The agency also made changes to the draft rules that increased opportunities for public participation during the permit application process.

"We appreciate that many of our comments were incorporated into the final version of the rules approved today by the Natural Resources Board," said Lundberg. "The Department clarified bulk sampling definitions that otherwise might have created even larger regulatory loopholes, limited open-ended language, and added another required public hearing earlier in the application process for prospecting and mining."

Yet the groups say that Wisconsin's metallic mining laws fail to adequately protect public health and the environment. For two decades, Wisconsin's "Prove it First" Law required mining companies to provide an example of a metallic sulfide mine in the U.S. that hadn't polluted local watersheds before it could establish a new mine in the state. In 2017, the Legislature passed Act 134, which repealed "Prove it First", eliminated important opportunities for public input, and made other changes to the law that weakened Wisconsin's nonferrous metallic mineral mining regulations.

"The approved mining rules are a minor improvement to a major rollback of regulations meant to protect public health and the environment from one of the world's most polluting industries," said Dave Blouin, Sierra Club-John Muir Chapter Mining Committee Chair.

"While we do feel DNR carried out a fair rulemaking process, it is essential that the public stay engaged in order to ensure that DNR rigorously evaluate any mining projects proposed under these new rules," stated Allison Werner, Policy & Advocacy Director at River Alliance of Wisconsin.

Now that the rules have been approved by the Board, they must be approved by the Governor before being sent to the Legislature for final review.

*Midwest Environmental Advocates is a public interest law center that works to defend public rights, protect natural resources, and ensure transparency and accountability in government. Learn more at [www.midwestadvocates.org](http://www.midwestadvocates.org) or on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/midwestadvocates](https://www.facebook.com/midwestadvocates).*

*Formed in 1993, River Alliance of Wisconsin is a statewide nonprofit, nonpartisan advocacy organization that empowers people to protect and restore Wisconsin's waters. The organization's membership includes more than 1,500 individuals, businesses, and local watershed groups. For more information, visit: [www.wisconsinrivers.org](http://www.wisconsinrivers.org)*

*Wisconsin's Green Fire supports the conservation legacy of Wisconsin by promoting science-based management of Wisconsin's natural resources. Learn more at [www.wigreenfire.org](http://www.wigreenfire.org).*

*Sierra Club is Wisconsin's voice for the nation's oldest, largest and most influential grassroots environmental organization. Learn more at <https://www.sierraclub.org/wisconsin>*

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