



[#wish4waterWI](#)

I wish for my children, and eventually their children, to have a safe and healthy community.

Iron Mining

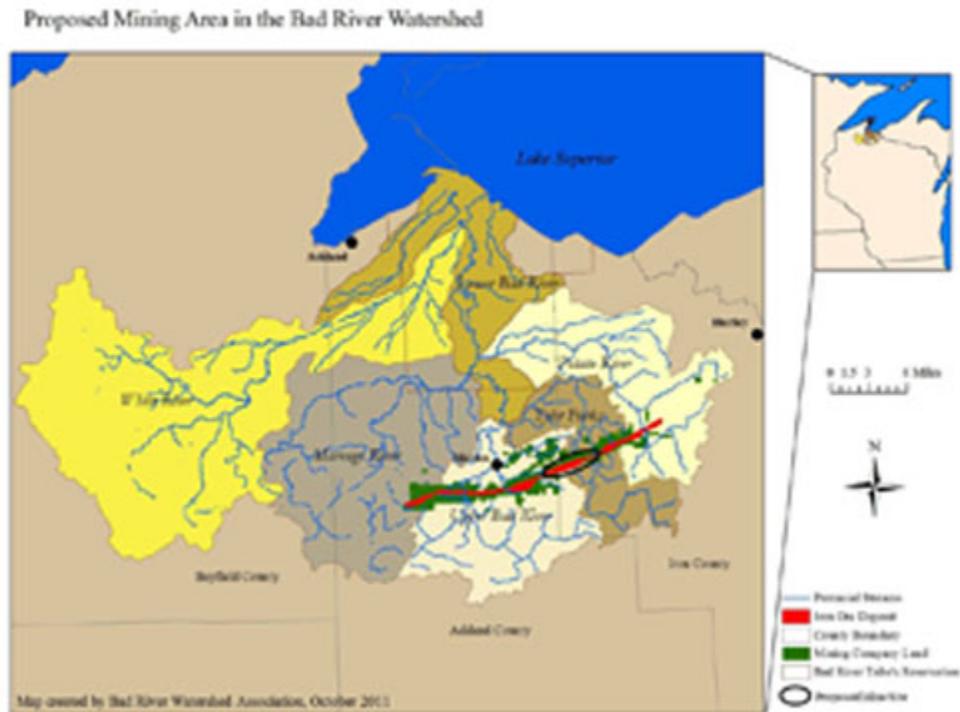
The Penokee Hills are part of a 21-mile long stretch of ancient iron-bearing rock spanning Ashland and Iron counties. The hills themselves are a thickly forested ecosystem with a web of streams and wetlands, which pour through canyons and waterfalls to meet the mighty Lake Superior in a vast coastal wetland complex nicknamed "Wisconsin's Everglades."

These sloughs are a magical place, an internationally-renowned feeding stop for migratory birds and the largest contiguous wild rice beds left on the world's largest freshwater lake. The sloughs and rice beds are also the sacred homeland of the Bad River Tribe of Lake Superior Chippewa.



Tyler Forks (left) and the Penokee Hills (right). Both areas would be completely demolished if the proposed mine is built.

In 2011, Gogebic Taconite (GTac) announced its intention to build an open pit mine in the Penokee Hills to extract taconite, a low-grade iron ore. The mine would initially be over four miles long, half a mile wide and 1,000 feet deep, with the potential to grow to up to 21 miles long. Even at its smallest, this would be the largest open-pit taconite mine in the world, essentially gutting the heart of the Penokee Hills and clogging the water-bearing arteries that feed the coastal wetlands.



Initially GTac claimed they had no desire to circumvent Wisconsin's existing mining laws, yet it became evident that the company, for all intents and purposes, wrote its own law and then persuaded lawmakers to pass it. Recent court records disclosed that nearly \$1 million in donations were made by GTac to candidates and political action committees to persuade lawmakers to pass a mining bill tailor-made to streamline the permitting of ferrous (iron) mining.

The new mining law

- sped up permitting deadlines
- weakened public input
- rolled back protections for the area's water, land and air, and
- limited the revenues local communities could collect to offset the cost of extractive industries to their staff and infrastructure.

The first version of the bill was narrowly defeated in 2011, but eventually passed in 2013. Another bill passed in 2013 locked the public out of county forest lands to which they normally would have access.

The state has also failed to consult with the Bad River Tribe as a sovereign government whose tribal reservation is located just six miles downstream from the proposed site. Additionally, the mine would be built in the Ceded Territories of Wisconsin, where federal treaties protect Indian fishing, hunting and harvesting rights. The Bad River tribe is currently working with the federal government to do what the state of Wisconsin has failed to do.

GTac is still early in the application process for the mine and faces formidable logistical challenges. Scientists have discovered asbestiform rock at the mine site, triggering health concerns. Geologists contend that waste rock that would be generated by mining may create acid mine drainage once it is exposed to air.

In September 2014, GTac announced plans to delay its application for a permit to mine, and to scale back the mine to just Iron County. Observers believe this change of plans grows out of intense public scrutiny of the proposed mine, and GTac's realization of the complex water impacts that iron mining presents at that location. GTac, however, remains publicly adamant that they intend to continue with the mine, and citizens around the state remain equally committed to a fair and transparent permitting process at all levels of government.

Aurora Conley



Water is crucial to both the lifestyle and livelihood of the Bad River Tribe of the Lake Superior Chippewa, who for generations have harvested wild rice from the largest remaining beds on the world's largest lake. But Aurora Conley has seen that way of life threatened over the past few years ever since Gogebic Taconite (GTac) announced its intention to build a gigantic open pit mine just a few miles upstream from the reservation. But becoming a mother has given Aurora a new perspective and a new motivation in her efforts to protect her family and her homeland.

Aurora Conley grew up on the shores of a mighty Great Lake, on the sacred homeland of the Bad River Tribe of the Lake Superior Chippewa. Water is crucial to both the way of life and livelihood of the tribe, which harvests wild rice from largest remaining wild rice beds on the world's largest lake. But the traditions and very way of life of Aurora's family and her tribe – and the safety of their land and water resources – have been under constant threat the last few years since Gogebic Taconite announced its intention to build a gigantic open pit mine just a few miles upstream from the reservation.

A few years ago, Aurora left the reservation for a time, traveling back and forth between Wisconsin and Minnesota. She took an opportunity to serve as executive assistant to Native American activist Winona LaDuke, founder and executive director of the non-profit Honor the Earth. Little did Conley know how invaluable that experience would be as she returned to her tribe and faced the looming fight against mining interests.

Now, working in the Bad River legal department, she has put her skills and experience to use helping organize and coordinate the many groups opposed to the mine. With so many unknowns about short- and long-term health and environmental impacts, as well as a political push that seems at times insurmountable, the groups are working to protect the Bad River homeland as well as the precious natural resources of the entire Penokee Hills area.

Through it all, Aurora has also taken on another, more important job: being a mother. Raising two young boys has given her a different perspective entirely on her hopes and dreams for the future of her family and her community. "Needless to say I have very deep connections to this land and its people," she says. "I don't want people to be sick. I want my family to be able to harvest wild rice as we always have. I just wish for my children, and eventually their children, to have a safe and healthy community."