

## 1 **5.2 NORTHMET PROJECT PROPOSED ACTION**

### 2 **5.2.1 Land Use**

3 This section evaluates the NorthMet Project Proposed Action against existing and applicable  
4 land use plans. The specific focus is on the consistency of the NorthMet Project Proposed Action  
5 with accepted plans, zoning ordinances, or land use agency management plans. It also addresses  
6 the legacy contamination and how it would be affected by proposed activities.

#### 7 **Summary**

8 Components of the NorthMet Project Proposed Action are subject to the requirements of local  
9 comprehensive land use plans or the Superior National Forest Plan. In all cases, the NorthMet  
10 Project Proposed Action activities are consistent with the formally adopted plans. The NorthMet  
11 Project Proposed Action would decrease the amount of land available for public access and use,  
12 and would decrease portions of the 1854 Ceded Territory available for use by the Bands., Given  
13 the historic use of the federal lands within the Mine Site for mineral exploration and ongoing  
14 restrictions on public access (see Section 4.2.11), the NorthMet Project Proposed Action would  
15 result in little or no change in actual public use of these lands.

#### 16 **5.2.1.1 Methodology and Evaluation Criteria**

17 The USFS uses the management area framework to broadly define the desired conditions and  
18 activities on lands within national forests. Land use outside the Superior National Forest is  
19 governed by local zoning and comprehensive plans. The management area designations  
20 applicable to the Mine Site and portions of the Transportation and Utility Corridor, as defined in  
21 the Forest Plan, are described in Section 4.2.1, as are zoning designations for land outside of the  
22 Superior National Forest.

23 The NorthMet Project Proposed Action is evaluated against the following evaluation criteria:

- 24 • compatibility of proposed land use with existing land use, land use plans, zoning ordinances,  
25 1854 Treaty obligations, and adjacent USFS management areas;
- 26 • anticipated outcomes related to identified contaminated lands; and
- 27 • the degree to which past, ongoing, or planned investigation and remediation actions at legacy  
28 contamination sites would be affected by disturbance associated with the NorthMet Project  
29 Proposed Action.

#### 30 **5.2.1.2 NorthMet Project Proposed Action**

##### 31 **5.2.1.2.1 Consistency with Zoning and Comprehensive Plans**

32 The NorthMet Project area lies within the Mineral Mining zoning districts of the cities of Babbitt  
33 and Hoyt Lakes (Arrowhead 2011; Hoyt Lakes Planning Commission 2010), and an industrial  
34 use district of St. Louis County (St. Louis County 2011). Therefore, the NorthMet Project area is  
35 compatible with the zoning ordinance and draft revised Comprehensive Land Use Plan and  
36 would not require an amendment of the respective zoning ordinances or Comprehensive Land  
37 Use Plans (Arrowhead 2011; City of Babbitt 1996). Both the county and municipal zoning  
38 districts surrounding the Plant Site are designated for industrial or mining use; the NorthMet

39 Project area is compatible with these designations and would not require amendments to current  
40 land uses. Privately owned parcels adjacent to the Mine Site fall under the same or similar  
41 zoning and land use designations; therefore, the NorthMet Project Proposed Action does not  
42 have the potential to conflict with surrounding land uses.

#### 43 **5.2.1.2.2 Consistency with Superior National Forest Plan**

44 The Mine Site is located within the Superior National Forest and on lands designated as a  
45 General Forest-Longer Rotation Management Area (USFS 2011a). In such areas, the USFS  
46 allows exploration, development, and processing of mineral resources under conditions where  
47 activities are consistent with sound environmental management so as to contribute to economic  
48 growth. In addition to managing project development, the USFS also requires preparation of  
49 associated reclamation plans to ensure the long term protection and restoration of the natural  
50 resources (USFS 2004b). The NorthMet Project Proposed Action would be consistent with these  
51 policies.

52 The NorthMet Project Proposed Action would represent a reactivation of the use of road and rail  
53 line for mining, which would be compatible with existing corridor land uses. Under the  
54 NorthMet Project Proposed Action, Dunka Road would remain private for mine operation use.  
55 Superior National Forest lands to the east, south, and southwest of the Transportation and Utility  
56 Corridor are accessible by forest roads and are not dependent on Dunka Road for access (see  
57 Figure 4.3.1-1), although Forest Road 113 connects Dunka Road to County Road 110 near  
58 Skibo, Minnesota. The NorthMet Project Proposed Action represents no anticipated change in  
59 the level of public access to either of these adjacent Superior National Forest parcels.

#### 60 **5.2.1.2.3 Areas of Concern**

61 Upon the purchase of a portion of the site, PolyMet became responsible for 29 AOCs (see legacy  
62 contamination discussion in Section 4.2.1.4.2). Of these, five have already been closed or have  
63 received a No Further Action letter from the MPCA (see Table 4.2.1-2). Additional investigation  
64 would be required to determine whether the remaining AOCs require further action. The  
65 NorthMet Project Proposed Action offers no direct resolution for the 33 AOCs that are  
66 designated as the responsibility of parties other than PolyMet (see Table 4.2.1-2). The MPCA  
67 VIC program would be utilized to facilitate and oversee remediation activity for any remaining  
68 potential historical releases on the 29 AOCs under the NorthMet Project Proposed Action.

#### 69 **5.2.1.3 NorthMet Project No Action Alternative**

70 The NorthMet Project No Action Alternative would result in no change in land management at  
71 the Mine Site and Transportation and Utility Corridor. Land at the Plant Site would continue to  
72 be managed in accordance with the existing closure plan and Consent Decree. The existing 1854  
73 Treaty obligations for the Mine Site and Plant Site would remain unchanged.