

# GoldSim Model Evaluation Work Plan NorthMet Project, Minnesota

Revised ERM Draft  
9 April 2012

## 1.0 Introduction

The NorthMet Project Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) will use GoldSim, a proprietary but publically available dynamic system model, to predict project effects on the quality of surface water and groundwater at designated evaluation locations within the Project Area. Two separate models are being developed for the NorthMet SDEIS. The first will evaluate the Mine Site, including mine facilities such as open pits, waste rock stockpiles, overburden storage areas, and waste water treatment plant (WWTP). The second will evaluate the Plant Site, including mine facilities such as process plants, ponds, WWTP, existing and future tailings basins, and groundwater collection wells.

Common to both models will be incorporation of hydrological processes including rainfall, evapotranspiration, surface water runoff, infiltration, surface water flow, groundwater flow, and groundwater storage. Chemical processes will include background water chemistry, chemical leaching from mine waste, groundwater solute transport, and seepage/mixing of groundwater into surface water. The water-quality models for the NorthMet Project are probabilistic, meaning that the uncertainty in the parameters describing the release and transport of chemicals is used to estimate uncertainty in the model predictions.

The model calculations incorporate processes and associated input parameters that affect the release and transport of chemicals from site facilities to natural systems beyond the site boundaries (such as perennial streams). During the period since models were first applied for the 2009 NorthMet Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), they have undergone extensive revision within an "Impact Assessment Planning" (IAP) process, a collaborative effort in which the project Co-lead agencies (MDNR, USACE, and USFS) plus the MPCA and technical representatives from the Cooperating Agencies (USEPA and the Tribes) who have met regularly to define water quality modeling needs. An important component in the IAP process has been to select ranges and probability distributions for model parameters.

The NorthMet water quality models will incorporate the range of transport processes and the uncertainty ranges of model parameters as agreed to by the Co-lead Agencies in IAP, Model Work Plan, and Model Calibration processes. Further, the models are largely transparent, meaning that all of the information on environmental behavior of the proposed NorthMet Project is presented in technical support documents provided by PolyMet and Barr Engineering. In particular, Mine Site and Plant Site Water Modeling Work Plans describe the conceptual models and list the probability distributions for all

model parameters (PolyMet, 2012a and 2012b). Technical support for the selection of model parameters is presented in the Mine Site and Plant Site Water Modeling Data Packages (PolyMet, 2011a and 2011b).

The GoldSim software contains algorithms that perform unit conversions, track local/global mass balances, and most importantly, automate Monte Carlo simulations for predicting uncertainty. However, most of the governing equations used in the NorthMet dynamic systems model (DSM) will be programmed into the GoldSim software by PolyMet's consultant, Barr Engineering. This programming process may introduce computational errors caused by incorrect equations, incorrect conditional statements, or transcription errors.

This memo describes the proposed review process for verifying that the GoldSim water quality models accurately implement the assumptions, inputs, and fate/transport calculations agreed upon by the Co-lead agencies. This verification will be performed by members of the ERM team who are independent of the Project sponsor (PolyMet) and the GoldSim modeler. This model evaluation work plan would be part of a broader Co-lead agency GoldSim Water Modeling Process (see flow diagram below).

## **2.0 Review Process**

This Model Evaluation Work Plan will occur during the Model True-up and Project Refinement Phases of the GoldSim Water Modeling Process:

- Model Input Review will occur during the Model True-up Phase and will provide assurance to the Co-leads that the approved guidance from the IAP process has been properly incorporated into the models; and
- Model Computation Review will occur during the Project Refinement Phase and will include checking model computations for chemical leaching, groundwater and surface water flow, solute transport, and mixing of groundwater into surface water

The review team will have a separate GoldSim license so the model can be operated independently of Barr. It is expected that Barr will provide a fully functioning version of the GoldSim NorthMet model for ERM evaluation.

For a model of this complexity, it is not feasible to apply *all* verifications to *all* components or calculations performed by the model. The general approach is to perform a reasonable number of initial verifications and then perform additional verifications to model components that are suspect. The verifications depend to some extent on the types of model components being evaluated. Water-related components are relatively straightforward, so emphasis will be placed on inputs, internal computations, and programmed equations. Chemical components are more complex and tend to involve multiple conditional statements in the programming. As a consequence, verification of the chemical components places emphasis on inputs,

local/global mass balances, and comparing GoldSim predictions to cases where the results can be calculated independently.

Model components subjected to independent testing will be selected to include those components most likely to affect the predictions of water quality impacts. Specific examples include the Category 1 waste rock stockpile and the West Pit Lake (these will remain as permanent features after closure), the concentration caps applied to solutes in the waste rock (these can impart large reductions in predicted solute release), and solutes associated with the mine wastes that have water quality limits (e.g., sulfate).

It is our understanding that Barr will provide a document presenting all equations that have been programmed into the GoldSim software. The model evaluation will assess the appropriateness of these equations given the model assumptions and where necessary, check that the equations are properly coded into the software. Resident algorithms in GoldSim, such as the Monte Carlo simulator and solute transport module, will not be reviewed. GoldSim has been extensively checked and debugged over its history of development and the resident algorithms are assumed to be correct.

## 2.1 Model Input Review (Phase I)

The Model Input Review, which will occur during the Model True-up Phase, focuses on checking for correct incorporation of input parameters into the GoldSim model. A Monte Carlo **simulation** will typically involve 500 to 1000 transient **runs** of the water quality computational model, with each run using a suite of input parameters. During each run, a set of calculations are performed for each **time step**. This leads to the following types of inputs:

- **Simulation-deterministic** parameters are set before the analysis begins and remain constant for all runs and all time steps.
- **Simulation-uncertain** parameters are determined at the beginning of the Monte Carlo simulation and remain constant for all runs and time steps. Using a random probability (between 0 and 1), the value for each input is sampled from the associated cumulative probability distribution (cpd) at the beginning of the simulation.
- **Run-uncertain** parameters are determined from the associated cpd's at the beginning of a run and remain constant for that run. The values are reset at the beginning of the next run.
- **Time-step-uncertain** parameters are determined from the associated cpd's at the beginning of a time step and remain constant for that time step. The values are reset at the beginning of the next time step.

Model input review takes advantage of GoldSim's ability to export tabulated summaries of model parameters, which can be formatted into Excel spreadsheets. Barr will be directed to program the GoldSim model to produce the following spreadsheets:

- **Simulation Input Spreadsheet** that tabulates all simulation-deterministic and simulation-uncertain parameters used in the Monte Carlo simulation. For each simulation-uncertain parameter, the compilation will include the random probability that was used to sample the associated cpd.
- **Run Input Spreadsheet** that tabulates all run-uncertain parameters. Each line of the spreadsheet will provide the values used for one run, and the parameter values and associated random probabilities will be listed in columns. The overall spreadsheet will have 500 to 1000 lines.
- **Time-Step Spreadsheet** will summarize time-step-uncertain inputs and associated random probabilities for a specified number of time steps specified by the user. Fortunately there are not too many inputs that change from time step to time step during a run. Each line of the spreadsheet will contain the uncertain input values associated with one time step. As a working number, 1000 time steps will be randomly selected from a simulation.

Barr will also be requested to reference the source of each input value (e.g., approved by the Geochemistry IAP Final Summary Memo dated 20 June 2011). Input review will involve checking the compiled spreadsheets and comparing the values with input descriptions provided in the approved final versions of the Mine Site Water Modeling Work Plan (including Tables 1-1 thru 1-34) and Plant Site Water Modeling Work Plan (including Tables 1-1 thru 1-50). For uncertain parameters, the random probability will be checked against the associated cpd to ensure that the associated input value was properly sampled. As a guideline, initial input checking will include:

- All values contained in the Simulation Input Spreadsheet
- 50 input types (columns) in the Run Input Spreadsheet
- All inputs in the Time-Step Spreadsheet

If the initial check does not identify any problems with model inputs, the process may be ended at that stage. If problems are identified, additional checks will be performed and any deficiencies will be brought to the attention of the Co-leads and PolyMet. The review process will continue until the reviewers have reasonable confidence that GoldSim is correctly setting and using the model input values.

Fred Marinelli will have lead responsibility for this Model Input Review. Once the spreadsheets identified above are provided, ERM can complete this review in approximately one week. This work can be done remotely as long as the requested spreadsheets can be emailed or posted to an ftp site.

**Comment [Erik C.1]:** Please generate a short report following the first plant site Phase I check and include the results of the first mine site Phase I check in the same document.

A second Phase I review will be conducted as soon as possible after the applicable data package and work plans are completed. This second review will be done at the end of the Model Results Check process and will focus only on changes to the model that occurred since the first Phase I review and to make sure past issues were addressed. The third and final Phase I review will occur after the Project Refinement process and will be comprehensive, much like the first Phase I review.

## 2.2 Model Computation Review (Phase II)

The Phase II Model Computation Review will provide a check of GoldSim calculations to ensure that model results are generated from mutually agreed upon equations and algorithms. Phase II will focus on the internal computations to provide a greater assurance that the GoldSim models function as defined in the work plans, data packages, and approved CDFs. The Model Computation Review described below will be applied separately to both the Mine Site and Plant Site models.

The Phase II review will be performed twice. The first Phase II check will occur at the end of the Model Results Check process and will include all approved CDFs. The second and final Phase II check will occur as the end of the Project Refinement process where project mitigation has been applied.

Given the scope and complexity of each model, it is not feasible to check all internal calculations performed by the code. This work plan proposes a strategy where the model reports internally computed numerical values and a multi-step verification process is used to assess the validity of those values. The verifications range from professional judgment to independent calculations that assess water/mass balances or attempt to reproduce the model computations in an exact or approximate manner. If the values are judged to be reasonably accurate, it is assumed that the model is performing its computations according to mutually agreed upon algorithms.

The starting point for this process is a detailed flow chart showing the model components and flow pathways between these components. General flow charts are provided in the Mine Site and Plant Site work plans. The Co-lead Agencies will request that these general charts be expanded to provide more details regarding the model components and flow routing between components. The next step will be for the Co-lead Agencies to identify discrete points on the flow chart at which flows, concentrations, and/or storage amounts are to be evaluated. In this work plan, each of these is referred to as a **Calculation Point** (CP). The CPs may include already designated Evaluation Locations, but will also include other points such as the interface between the tailings basin and each groundwater flow path so we can confirm the tailings basin algorithms are working properly. ERM will choose a sufficient number of CPs to provide an adequate sampling of the CPs, but also limit the total number of CPs to provide efficiency in the Phase II review.

After the CPs are identified, the GoldSim model will be modified by Barr to generate tabulated data files for each CP on a time step by time step basis. EXCEL

**Comment [Erik C.2]:** Are you being deferential here or should the DNR do the request? If deferential, suggest changing to ERM.

**Comment [M03]:** Erik – if DNR will be requesting these charts, I would suggest doing this sooner rather than later. They would be helpful for the current MRC process.

**Comment [Erik C.4]:** Are you being deferential here or should the DNR do the request? If deferential, suggest changing to ERM.

spreadsheets are a convenient format for these data files, but other file structures may be agreed upon. For CPs on flow lines, the model output will be flow rates and chemical concentrations. For CPs associated with mine facilities, the model output will generally be stored water volume and chemical mass. To reduce file size, concentrations and stored masses will be provided for about six mutually agreed upon chemical constituents that are potentially relevant to regulatory decision making. The list of reported chemical constituents will be developed after initial GoldSim runs have been evaluated by the Co-lead Agencies.

To focus on the effects that individual mine facilities could have on downgradient waters, the Phase II review will consider transport of chemicals along **Migration Pathways**, each representing a sequence of model connections that transport chemicals from a source (e.g., a waste rock facility) to **Evaluation Locations** where concentrations are compared against regulatory standards. The review will also consider water and mass balances within mutually agreed upon **Control Volumes** (CVs). In this workplan, a CV is defined as a model component or a grouping of model components, within which, water and chemical mass cannot be artificially created or lost. GoldSim operates by moving water and solutes between CVs in discrete steps through time. A mass balance accounts for mass inflow and outflow across the boundaries of the CV and the change of mass inside the CV.

Comment [M05]: Please provide an example

The data files generated by GoldSim will allow the above checks to be made without relying on check-specific programming being added to the GoldSim model. This will insure that the Phase II checks are performed independently from the GoldSim model developer. It is recognized that the requested data files will be large, but the programming used to create the files is relatively straightforward. In addition, each data set will be created for a single deterministic run, not from multiple realizations generated by the Monte Carlo simulations.

### 2.2.1 Evaluation Process

The Phase II review will consist of the following three steps:

- Step 1.** Professional screening evaluation of calculated values at all CPs.
- Step 2.** Evaluation of water and chemical mass balances for designated CVs throughout the simulation period.
- Step 3.** Verification of flows and concentrations along selected Migration Pathways at specific times during the simulation.

The ERM review team will conduct deterministic runs of the GoldSim model in order to generate the outputs necessary for Phase II evaluation. One model run will be based on mean values for input variables. The additional runs may utilize minimums and/or maximums of certain input variables in order to test the model's logic algorithms for handling extreme values. For example, conditions may be simulated in one deterministic run to ensure that leach concentrations are controlled by concentration caps so that this aspect of the model algorithm can be evaluated.

In addition to model outputs, the review team will require access to a complete copy of the GoldSim model to allow for calculation pathway tracing, model logic elucidation, and the ability to obtain additional specific values from model components as needed to complete the Phase II review. The logic previously added to the GoldSim models for echoing input parameters (Phase I review) will be retained through the Phase II evaluation to provide the review team access to spreadsheet compilations of input values used in model calculations.

Phase II will take approximately 5 – 7 work days of very focused effort by three people to complete, depending on the number of issues identified in Step 1. Specific requirements for each Phase II evaluation step are described in the following sections.

### **Step 1: Professional evaluation of calculated values at the CPs**

Step 1 will involve the use of professional judgment and simple calculations to screen results at CPs for evidence of unlikely values and improbable changes in values over time. While primarily a qualitative assessment, hand and spreadsheet calculations may be performed to provide a basis for judging the reported CP flows, concentrations, and chemical masses. For example, simple calculations may be performed to compute the possible maximum and minimum values for a parameter at a CP. If the GoldSim reported value falls outside this range, the portion of the model computing the value will be flagged for further evaluation. This step will provide a time-efficient way to screen the results of CPs and Migration Pathways for potential problems before progressing to more detailed verification of results determined by specific portions of the model.

Step 1 of the Phase II evaluation will require Barr to deliver a working version of GoldSim that generates Excel-based time-series output files with flows and concentrations (or chemical masses) for the six (plus or minus) chemical constituents at the stipulated CPs. The list of specific constituents considered in the Phase II review will be selected by the ERM review team in coordination with the Co-Lead Agencies, and are not identified specifically in this work plan. The review team will assess the reasonableness of the reported mass flux and chemical concentrations over the course of the model simulation. If necessary, the review team may make additional requests for Barr to output other model values.

### **Step 2: Evaluation of water and chemical mass balances within selected CVs over the simulation period**

Cumulative water volume and chemical mass balances will be used to determine if water and chemicals are properly tracked by the model. After definition of single and multi-component CVs within the model flow chart, water volume and chemical mass flows into and out of each CV will be computed by the review team based on flow and concentration values reported for the associated CPs as part of Step 1. To preserve independence, these calculations will be programmed in the EXCEL spreadsheets by the review team, not the model developer. In addition, the water volume and chemical

**Comment [M06]:** Does this mean the GoldSim modelers (Barr) will know which specific constituents we'll be looking at in our QA/QC beforehand? Suggest these Excel output files contain all constituents and use a selective portion of these outputs during the Phase II QA/QC.

**Comment [M07]:** Question still remains as to when these constituents will be selected by ERM and the co-lead agencies.

**Comment [Erik C.8]:** I am looking for a home for comments #18 and #19 from Liljegen's unresolved issues spreadsheet. Can this be done during this process or included somewhere else in the Phase II check?



mass stored within each CV will be accounted for. Water and chemical mass fluxes will be tracked as cumulative values over the course of a deterministic (rather than Monte Carlo) simulation. The resulting values will be used to confirm that the following relationship is maintained in each CV throughout the simulation for both water and chemical constituents:

$$\text{initial mass} + \text{cumulative mass in} - \text{cumulative mass out} = \text{remaining mass}$$

Output will be evaluated for several deterministic runs in order to confirm the mass balance for mean and extreme input values. A relevant example would be the mass balance of sulfate in Cat 1 waste rock facility, where at the end of a simulation the total amount of soluble sulfate produced by oxidation should equal the mass leached out by meteoric water + the mass stored in the rock when pore water concentrations were above the concentration cap for sulfate. Results of the mass balances for selected CVs will be presented graphically to illustrate how accurately mass is tracked through the GoldSim model.

### **Step 3: Independent verification of selected migration pathways at selected time points during the simulation**

Step 3 will involve verification of certain model results through independent calculations by the review team. Several representative Migration Pathways will be selected for review. The review team will evaluate a sufficient number of Migration Pathways to provide a reasonable level of assurance that the overall model is performing as proposed. This will be a quantitative assessment, the rigor of which will be assessed and modified during the process. Emphasis will be placed on pathways providing the greatest chemical flux that ultimately reaches the Evaluation Locations where chemical concentrations are compared with Regulatory Criteria. For example, in the Plant Site model, emphasis will be placed on seepage and chemical concentrations emanating from the Tailings Basin and in associated groundwater and surface water flow paths that carry chemical mass to the Embarrass River. It is anticipated that three or four major pathways will be identified in each GoldSim model.

**Comment [M09]:** Will these pathways be determined from the sensitivity analysis?

The deterministic runs will be set up to test mean input values as well as extreme ranges of selected input parameters. For example, in tracking chemical migration, the model export process will obtain the values for oxidation rates in mine waste (which is related closely to release rates for most solutes) and the concentration caps (i.e., maximum dissolved concentrations of parameters in pore water) to ensure that the values for these critical parameters applied in the model accurately match the values set in the input. Specifically, oxidation rates in tailings are related to the sulfide concentration in the solids and the moisture content of the tailings; so the model will export sulfide concentrations in tailings and the moisture content of these materials. In waste rock, however, oxidation is related to initial sulfide concentration and the time since the rock was emplaced, and thus, these values will be exported from GoldSim so that the model oxidation rate at this point can be compared to an independent calculation. Hydrologic input variables along the Migration Pathway that are required to



compute system flow rates (i.e., rainfall, evapotranspiration) will also need to be output to the Excel-based files.

For each selected Migration Pathway, the review team will perform independent calculations to track chemical migration from its source to the Evaluation Location. The calculations will independently compute the mass flux along the pathway and compare this with mass flux simulated in the model. The independent evaluation will be based on a combination of time-step calculations that attempt to reproduce the model computations, use of average conditions over certain time intervals, and min/max calculations that attempt to bracket the model results.

### 2.2.2 Phase II Reporting

For each step in the evaluation, the review team will document any model outputs that are judged to be unreasonable or that contradict independent calculations performed by the team. Possible discrepancies identified during Phase II will be discussed with Barr and the Co-lead Agencies before they are identified in the formal record. ~~After these discussions, the remaining unexplained discrepancies between model results and expected results will be documented and presented the Co-lead Agencies for formal review and comment.~~ At the completion of each Phase II evaluation and after discussion with Barr and the Co-lead Agencies, a memo will be produced detailing all findings including any unresolved discrepancies or errors identified for Co-lead Agency review and comment. Along with the memo, any independent calculations produced by the review team to check model function will be documented in calculation sheets. The team will develop several standard forms to provide hardcopy results from each step in the Phase II evaluation that can be reviewed by third parties. In many cases, the documented calculations will consist of calculation worksheets that show the input values, equations used, and results/comparisons with the GoldSim outputs. The Phase II report will also identify probabilistic input values that based on ERM's review of tornado diagrams and other information could be converted to deterministic values for the Final EIS modeling.

**Comment [Erik C.10]:** Since the second Phase I and first Phase II will be performed together for the plant site and mine site, I think the report should include Phase I results too. I think this would better tie into the summary report described in section 2.3 which includes the resolution of Phase I and Phase II issues found.

## 2.3 Model Evaluation Documentation

ERM will coordinate with Barr and the Co-lead Agencies to correct any input or computational errors uncovered. ERM will submit to the MDNR a summary report at the end of the Model True-up Phase and the Project Refinement Phase documenting the findings resulting from executing the Model Evaluation Work Plan.

## 3.0 References

PolyMet Mining (2012a). NorthMet Mine Site Water Modeling Work Plan, Ver. 5. January 10, 2012.

PolyMet Mining (2012b). NorthMet Plant Site Water Modeling Work Plan, Ver. 3. January 10, 2012.

PolyMet Mining (2011a). NorthMet Project Water Modeling Data Package, Volume 1 - Mine Site. Ver. 9, December 2, 2011.

PolyMet Mining (2011b). NorthMet Project Water Modeling Data Package, Volume 2 - Plant Site. Ver. 4, December 2, 2011.

PolyMet Mining (2011c). Mine Site Water Quality Model Quality Assurance Project Plan. November 7, 2011.

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<Insert GoldSim Water Modeling Process 1/20/12 (PDF)>

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