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James Grimes /R5/USEPA/US
07/13/2012 09:40 AM

To Kenneth Westlake, Simon Manoyan, Michael Sedlacek,
Melanie Haveman, Christine Wagener, Thomas Poleck,
James Grimes, Daniel Cozza, Stephen Roy

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Subject Duluth News Tribune

Published July 13, 2012, 12:00 AM

House bill would cut environmental review time for mines

The U.S. House on Thursday moved to speed up the environmental process for mining projects and to apply those new rules to projects already in the works, such as the PolyMet copper mine proposed near Hoyt Lakes.

By: [John Myers](#), Duluth News Tribune

The U.S. House on Thursday moved to speed up the environmental process for mining projects and to apply those new rules to projects already in the works, such as the PolyMet copper mine proposed near Hoyt Lakes.

The legislation is aimed at strategic mineral projects on federal lands, limiting the review time, public input and legal challenges. “Strategic” is defined as having value for national defense, energy, economic security, trade balance and domestic manufacturing.

The bill, HR 4402, sponsored by Rep. Mark Amodei, R-Nev., passed the House by a 256-160 margin.

An amendment by U.S. Rep. Chip Cravaack, R-North Branch, which passed on a voice vote, would allow projects that already have applied for a permit to use the new expedited process under the bill.

The bill appears to apply to both mineral exploration and actual mining projects.

There has been no action on the proposal in the Senate, which has been less favorable to major changes in environmental laws. And on Wednesday the Obama administration issued a statement saying the bill would circumvent public protections of federal lands, including eliminating appropriate reviews under the National Environmental Policy Act, and the circumvention of the public input process and curtailing the ability for court review.

Supporters say the law is needed to speed up mining projects for heavily used minerals such as

copper and nickel, which the U.S. now gets mostly from other countries.

“Duplicative regulations, bureaucratic inefficiency and lack of coordination between federal agencies are threatening the economic recovery of my home state and jeopardizing our national security,” Amodei said in a statement. The bill “would simply bring some predictability and transparency to the permitting process to leverage our nation’s vast mineral resources, while paying due respect to economic and environmental concerns.”

The bill would cap federal environmental review at 30 months, including permitting.

Cravaack noted that the PolyMet project has been in environmental review for about seven years. He said his amendment would ensure that mining projects are given a firm timeline that “workers, communities and families can count on.”

The bill “is a common-sense, pro-growth piece of legislation that would simply facilitate a timely permitting process for very important mining projects throughout the United States,” Cravaack said in a statement, adding that “30 months is plenty of time to complete the total review process for permitting a mine.”

But opponents of the bill say 30 months might not be enough time, especially in the case of PolyMet.

Samantha Chadwick, preservation advocate for the environmental group Environment Minnesota, pointed out that it was the current federal review process that forced PolyMet to rework its original environmental protection plans and environmental review after they were deemed unacceptable by the Environmental Protection Agency.

Without the full federal review process, bill opponents noted, PolyMet’s original environmental review might have been approved, bypassing the major environmental improvements that have been added since then.

“This bill is a gift to the mining industry,” Chadwick said. “It gives big companies even more power to harm public lands, and could make it easier for out-of-state companies to conduct polluting sulfide mining in the Superior National forest and near the Boundary Waters.”

The Obama administration said the bill’s wording was so vague that it could apply to all kinds of mining, adding that the bill “undermines existing law calling for the multiple uses of public lands by placing mining interests above all other uses. This change has the potential to threaten hunting, fishing, recreation and other activities which create jobs and sustain local economies across the country.”

Frank Ongaro, executive director of Mining Minnesota, an industry group, said there have been discussions between Cravaack and state mining company officials about the legislation. Ongaro said how the bill might apply to specific situations is unclear, but that his group supports the concept of the legislation.

“Whether it’s the federal legislation, or the governor signing an executive order to streamline the permitting process, it’s a step forward,” Ongaro said. “You still have the same regulations and standards in place. But to do it in a more timely manner, that’s a positive step.

A PolyMet official did not immediately return a request to comment on the legislation.

James G. Grimes

Assisting the Environmental Protection Agency under a Cooperative Agreement with the National Asian Pacific Center on Aging.

Phone: 

EPA-R5-2014-001593-72

Daniel Cozza /R5/USEPA/US

07/13/2012 09:46 AM

To Mary.Manydeeds, Scott.Doig, Thomas L Weaver, Perry M Jones, fafitzpa, James R Stark, Frederick.VandeVenter, mark.kuester, Jennifer Manville, Ed Fairbanks, James Ruppel, Margaret Millard, Kenneth Westlake, Sue Elston, Barbara Wester, RobertL Thompson, Ross Micham, Jose Deleon, John Colletti, George Azevedo, Kathleen Mayo, David Pfeifer, Charmagne Ackerman, Kestutis Ambutas, Eloise Mulford, Stephanie Cheaney, Benjamin Giwojna, Melanie Haveman, Erik Olson, Christine Wagener, Joanna Glowacki, Genevieve Damico, Elizabeth Laplante, Patrick Hamblin, Stephen Roy, Simon Manoyan, Nuria Muniz, Robie Anson, Michael Sedlacek, James Grimes, Sheila Desai, Nefertiti DiCosmo, Krista McKim, Jennifer Darrow, nancyschuldt, Margaret Watkins, "Tod LeGarde", John Coleman, Esteban Chiriboga, Ann McCammon-Soltis, Todd Warner, Charles Brumleve, jkoski, ejohnston, thomas.pietila, george.beck, jbohm, sbowe, abosak, ccharwood, 1854treatyauthority, swieting, Brandy Toft, Sam Malloy, "M. Ripley", Environmental, "Jeff Mears", vflowers, larmagost, ldfbrownfields, Nate.Guldan, Natalene.Cummings, JGodwin

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Subject Fw: Duluth News Tribune article

Article from Duluth News Tribune:

----- Forwarded by Daniel Cozza/R5/USEPA/US on 07/13/2012 09:45 AM -----

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