Tribe Worried About Mine Has Own Pollution Issues

BAYFIELD, Wis. (AP) — A Lake Superior Chippewa band worried about the possible environmental impact of a proposed iron ore mine in northwestern Wisconsin has its own pollution issues, according to federal records.

Bad River Band has had numerous violations of water quality standards at its wastewater treatment plant, which serves some residents of the reservation in Ashland County, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

Excessive levels of E. coli and phosphorus were first reported by Media Trackers, an organization that does research for conservative causes. E. coli is a marker for the presence of fecal contamination, and phosphorus can harm fish and aquatic animals because it accelerates plant and algae growth.

The tribe and its chairman, Mike Wiggins Jr., have been sharply critical of Gogebic Taconite's plan to construct an open pit mine in Bayfield and Iron counties. The Bad River fear sulfides in waste rock could harm tribal lands upstream on the shore of Lake Superior.

Bad River's plant is currently operating without a permit from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, but has not been fined.

The Bad River Band has recently been given approval by the EPA to set water quality standards for the reservation and upstream users. The mine would have to abide by the tribe's standards, and thus, tribal opposition to the $1.5 billion mine has received considerable attention.

Wiggins told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel (http://bit.ly/Y0Mc3O [1]) that much of the wastewater plant problem is due to human error and poor reporting.

"It's something that we are working proactively to fix," Wiggins said. The tribe's water testing downstream from the treatment plant shows it's safe for consumption, he added.

The New York Times reported in 2012 on water polluters in all 50 states. The Bad River had the highest number of violations in Wisconsin between 2004 and 2008 with 241. The Red Cliff Band followed with 159.

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Information from: Milwaukee Journal Sentinel, http://www.jsonline.com *[2]*

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