



DNR Q&A

Jan. 28, 2014

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Questions and answers about new river flow data for proposed PolyMet mining project

Minnesota Department of Natural Resources' experts are reviewing new stream flow data for the Partridge River near the proposed PolyMet mining project in northeastern Minnesota. In response to recently published reports about the new data, Steve Colvin, deputy director, Ecological and Water Resources Division, answers some questions:

Q: Does the availability of new flow data invalidate the Supplemental Draft Environmental Impact Statement (SDEIS) analysis?

A: No. The new data is within the base flow estimated from the previous data. Here's why they are comparable: The current water-quality model used an input value of 1.5 cubic feet per second (cfs) as base flow for the upper Partridge River. That number included the 0.5 cfs predicted by the surface-water model and based on a downstream gage, but also included an additional 1.0 cfs to account for some groundwater discharge from the nearby Northshore mine. The new gage, which also measures Northshore's groundwater discharges, provided data in the range of 1.3 to 1.8 cfs.

Q: When did this new stream flow data come to light and who is collecting it?

A: The stream gaging station on the Partridge River at the Dunka Road crossing was installed on May 25, 2011 for a different mining company in the area. The gaging station is continuously monitored year-round by the DNR and is still in operation.

Q: Was the latest data used in the water quality models for the proposed project?

A: Data from this gage were not available at the time we ran the water-quality models for the SDEIS. The DNR conducted a base flow analysis on data collected at the gaging station over the period from December 2011 thru March 2012, but analysis of the data wasn't completed until December 2013. For the SDEIS, we used commonly accepted hydrologic techniques to estimate base flows in the upper Partridge River from an existing U.S. Geological Survey gage located 17 miles downstream but in the same watershed.

Q: Will you use these data to rerun the computer water quality model used in the environmental analysis?

A: The river flow data inform the scientific models used to determine potential environmental impacts of the proposed copper-nickel mine, which is currently undergoing a public review of its SDEIS. We cannot make a judgment yet on how these additional data might inform a revision of

the SDEIS. Considerations will include whether the new data accurately reflect long-term river flows and whether they materially affect model results.

Q: What happens after the new data are analyzed?

A: At that point, the DNR and its co-lead agencies will be able to determine if additional work related to base flows is required and identify any implications for the environmental review timetable. No specific timetable for finalizing the EIS has been laid out, and the agency will take the time necessary to ensure a thorough and rigorous scientific review. Scientific data collection and analysis continue throughout the environmental review process and permitting.

Q: Is this river data a new issue?

A: No. The SDEIS fully describes the entire parameters of the water model, including assumptions and questions about river base flows, in Section 5.2.2.2.3 from pages 5-114 through 5-121.