



Upper Peninsula Environmental Coalition NEWSLETTER

October 1989

October 1989 Meeting

The October UPEC meeting will begin at 7 pm on Tuesday the 10th at Ely Township Hall. The Township Hall is one block off of U.S. 41 on Diorite Road west of Ishpeming (across from Lawry's Pasty Shop). Our planned tour of Mead's paper mill in Escanaba has had to be postponed indefinitely because the company doesn't give tours on weekends. We will wait until November to return to our weekend meeting schedule.

Trust Only Yourself, Air Quality Expert Tells Mill Meeting

Building a paper mill on Keweenaw Bay could be a tremendously disruptive influence on the Upper Peninsula—not only environmentally, but socially as well. That is the view of Alex Sagady, Director of Occupational and Environmental Health for the American Lung Association of Michigan. Sagady was in Baraga on September 7th to address a meeting convened by FOLK (Friends of the Land of Keweenaw), the grass-roots group which has risen to oppose the mill plans being pushed by James River Corporation and the Western Upper Peninsula Forest Improvement District.

An audience of 125 braved a stormy night to listen to Sagady detail a long list of air pollution problems which would come with a mill. He began by summarizing the bleached kraft pulp-making process, which is what James River would like to use at the Keweenaw Bay site (see "The Bleached Kraft Process: How It Works," below). He went on to describe some glaring shortcomings in how pulp and paper mills are regulated. For example, computer models of how pollution circulates after it leaves a smokestack—the ones regulators will use to evaluate the impacts of a Keweenaw Bay mill—assume a perfectly flat terrain with no bodies of water nearby. While this may be accurate for Kansas, it does not address the complexity of air circulation along a lakeshore. Temperature inversions over the Bay (a common occurrence), along with a breeze blowing in off the lake (also common), could combine to trap the plume of pollution coming out of the mill stack. The plume would then float inland until it strikes a boundary layer in the air. This causes it to dip sharply downward

Sagady says that regulations to restrict air and water pollution from mills, which might look reassuring on paper, are all too often "phantoms or ghosts." Promises to install the "best available control technology" (BACT) sound good, but in fact the official BACT is often a political football, something to be negotiated between the company and the DNR, and may not represent the best that can actually be achieved. Similarly, EPA regulations (the "new source standards") are 5 to 10 years behind the times in terms of clean-up technology.

And the pollution controls installed in mills often simply don't work, because of malfunctions, "upset conditions," and "transient operating features." This is especially true during the first year, as the company works to get the bugs out, but these "non-steady-state conditions" continue for the life of the mill, and can greatly increase the rate of emissions per hour. These emissions are unregulated by the EPA and DNR. Another concern is transportation safety, because the bleached kraft process uses one railcar per week of liquid chlorine for bleaching the pulp. (The downstate town of Freeland had to be evacuated for a week this past summer after a derailment of chemical cars.)

Particularly disturbing was Sagady's assessment of Michigan's air pollution enforcement provisions, which he called "the weakest in the country." This is because Michigan allows only criminal, not civil, penalties for air quality violations. Criminal violations are extremely hard to prove because one has to show willful misconduct on the part of the polluter. So in practice, DNR air pollution regulators go by "rules of thumb" that are closer to best guesses than scientifically based decisions. This is partly because of a huge gap in our knowledge about the whole range of pollutants emitted from pulp mills. And there are no scientific studies that definitively tell how toxic air pollutants affect our health. There could be hundreds of different kinds coming out of a mill. In fact, a new type of dioxin, completely unknown before, was recently discovered in pulp mill emissions.

Sagady also cited a recent medical study which found pulp mill workers have a significantly higher risk of getting cancer

FOLK Support is Building as FID, James River Press for Mill

Apart from sponsoring Sagady's talk, FOLK has spent the last month gathering support and monitoring contacts between the Western U.P. Forest Improvement District (FID), James River, and the state government. FID has been laying off forestry consultants to marshal its resources to obtain the land James River needs for the mill. FID also has put in a line-item request to the legislature for money to buy land for a state-James River land swap. This raises the question of what FID's goals are supposed to be. As the UPEC Board understands it, FID was created (and is currently publicly funded) to promote forest industry and small-timber-owner land management. What they are now doing besides promoting a mill is not clear. FID's director has acknowledged that the group must stand on its own after its first five years of public funding runs out.

Meanwhile, James River may be in line to get \$5-10 million from the state and be exempt from certain taxes if the mill project is approved under the Targeted Industry Act. James River has also approached the state about the possibility of getting a "mixing zone" declared in Keweenaw Bay, which would ease some of the pollution restrictions the company would otherwise face. Another idea that is floating around, apparently to appease mill opponents, would require James River to use up to 50% recycled content in a Keweenaw Bay mill. Reportedly, DNR Director David Hales has been considering this, and the Natural Resources Commission is in favor, though there is no official word as of yet.

For its part, FOLK has already gotten nearly 1,000 signatures on its petition opposing the mill. FOLK representatives also made a very effective presentation before the Baraga County Commission in early September, and even got the Commission to appoint a liaison to FOLK. The group is also keeping a close eye on FID and DNR activities, and is lining up more speakers on mill issues.

Calling All Foresters! FOLK Needs You!

Are you a professional forester concerned about the quality of life in the U.P.?

Expert Tells Mill Meeting

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Sagady's central message, however, was the importance of maintaining a healthy skepticism of official assurances and company promises. "Don't trust James River, don't trust the EPA, don't trust the DNR," he declared. "Trust only yourselves." Why?

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Sagady also cited a recent medical study which found pulp mill workers have a significantly higher risk of getting cancer than a non-exposed control group. This issue of occupational health is particularly important on light of recent reports of health problems among the Champion mill workers at Quinnesec.

In the end, Sagady said, allowing a mill to be built on Keweenaw Bay could imperil the cohesiveness, perhaps even the culture, of the regional community. It would be a "Faustian bargain"—a reference to Goethe's story in which Doctor Faust sells his soul to the devil in return for a few years of earthly fame and power.

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Calling All Foresters! FOLK Needs You!

Are you a professional forester concerned about the quality of life in the U.P.? Do you have expertise or experience in forestry that you'd like to donate to a good cause? If so, FOLK would like to have your help. FOLK is looking for people who can advise it on forestry issues so it can take on a multibillion-dollar company. And if you need confidentiality, FOLK will guarantee it. If you can help in any way, please call Kraig Klungness at 482-2967 or write FOLK at P.O. Box 168, L'Anse, MI 49946.

Pictured Rocks Non-Committal on UPEC Scenic Drive Proposal

Board Member Dave Bach reported that

Pictured Rocks National Lakeshore Superintendent Grant Petersen has sent a non-committal response to UPEC's scenic drive alternative. UPEC is proposing that the federal government fund the paving of County Road H-58 between Legion Lake and Sullivan's Landing, with a new spur road being built to the Beaver Basin overlook, rather than building a whole new scenic drive through the Beaver Basin area. UPEC feels this is a cheaper and more environmentally sound alternative, but it remains to be seen if the Park Service will include it in its official list of alternatives as part of the project's environmental impact statement. Petersen's response was not clear on this point; he said, "As the EIS process progresses, we will want to discuss with the Coalition its ideas. . . ." Dave will be following up on this issue.

North-Country Trail Builders Chalk Up Another Success

Two weeks of hard work by a group of volunteers has produced about 8 more miles of the North Country Trail (NCT). Once again, Board Member Doug Welker was instrumental in getting the job done. The new mileage is in the southwest corner of the McCormick Tract; next year the NCT will tie into the Craig Lake State Park trail system. While the planning process for the McCormick Tract won't be done for at least another year, Doug says that the consensus seems to be to keep the NCT away from the Tract's heavy-use areas.

Motors in Sylvania: Is Crooked Lake Wilderness or Not?

Board Member Bill Malmsten raised the question of whether the Forest Service is supposed to let motorboats use Crooked Lake in the Sylvania Wilderness Area. Crooked Lake is one of the main access points to Sylvania, and not only fishing motors but pontoons and ski boats are a common sight on the lake. The Forest Service maintains a boat landing on the north side of the lake. It is not very clear whether Crooked is part of the legal wilderness or not, and what regulations should apply to it even if it isn't. Bill will write to Dave Morton, the Ottawa National Forest Supervisor, on behalf of UPEC to get a

detailed account of the wilderness boundaries and the Service's management policies for Crooked Lake.

UPEC Convinces UPPCO to Post Sprayed Areas

Responding to requests from UPEC and individual concerned citizens, the Upper Peninsula Power Company (UPPCO) has agreed to erect notices at access points to areas along power lines where pesticides have been sprayed. The postings will tell what chemical has been sprayed and when, and will give a phone number to call for more information. The postings are important because people commonly pick berries in the fields under power lines. UPPCO serves a wide area of the central and western U.P., stretching from Ontonagon to Munising and from Escanaba to Keweenaw County.

Low-Level Dump Siting Criteria Still Unclear

Even after an exchange of letters with UPEC President Gayle Coyer, the Michigan Low-Level Radioactive Waste Authority (LLRWA) has still not explained how it will weight its "favorability criteria" in deciding where to locate a low-level radioactive waste dump. Gayle wrote to Jim Cleary, Commissioner with the LLRWA, to protest its plan to let local committees determine the weightings *after* the potential site has been announced. UPEC is concerned that local committees will simply bias the weightings to make their site look less desirable. UPEC argues that the criteria need to be laid out *before* the candidate sites are announced.

In a letter to UPEC, Cleary defended the LLRWA approach, contending that "the feelings and values of people living near the candidate site should be given consideration when focusing down to selecting the host site. Favorability criteria were developed to address these concerns." But then he went on to say that "while it is true that each candidate site community may rank the favorability criteria differently, the scientific data regarding protection of public health and the environment are the determining factors for suitability of a site. . . . [A local community's] appraisal of the favorability criteria will not affect the integrity of a

suitable site; however, it will allow them meaningful input into the site selection process." It is hard to see how "meaningful" local input will be when the favorability criteria apparently can be disregarded if the public health and environmental conditions are deemed favorable by the LLRWA. As of this writing, the LLRWA has not announced the candidate sites.

The Bleached Kraft Process: How it Works

1. Logs arrive at the mill, are stripped of bark, and chopped into chips. Wood waste boilers are used to burn off sulfur dioxide compounds. The boilers discharge particulate matter, sulfur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide, and total reduced sulfur (TRS) into the air.

2. The chips are steamed under pressure, then mixed with and digested in a solution of sodium sulfide and sodium hydroxide. Waste solution (known as "black liquor") is drawn off from the digester and sent to a recovery boiler where it is thickened and then burned. Recovery boilers discharge the same pollutants as wood waste boilers.

3. The digested chips are now pulp. The pulp is bleached in a series of steps using oxygen, chlorine, and chlorine dioxide. Several of these steps produce large amount of water pollutants that are treated and then dumped into nearby water bodies (in James River's case, this would be Keweenaw Bay or the Sturgeon River).

4. In the meantime, the residue from the recovery boiler is sent to a dissolving tank, where it is processed and partly recovered for re-use in the mill. This process itself involves the use of a lime kiln, which discharges TRS, sulfur dioxide, and carbon monoxide into the air.

5. The bleached pulp is dried before being baled and shipped, or before being made into paper on-site.

This is a greatly simplified summary of the bleached kraft process, taken from an excellent two-page explanation prepared by Alex Sagady of the American Lung Association of Michigan. You may obtain one by writing Alex at ALAM, 403 Seymour, Lansing, MI 48933. A self-addressed stamped envelope would be appreciated.

UPEC Officers: President Gayle Coyer, Skandia, 942-7767; Vice President Marilyn Cooper, Houghton, 482-7834; Secretary-Treasurer Dave Bach, Atlantic Mine, 482-6543; Corresponding Secretary Dickie Selfe, Houghton, 482-5663; Board Members-at-Large: Robert T. Brown, Houghton, 482-0945; Kraig Klungness, Houghton, 482-2967; William Malmsten, Ishpeming, 485-5909; William L. Robinson, Marquette, 226-2723; Jon Saari, Marquette, 228-4656; Gregory Seppanen, Harvey, 249-3949; Scot Stewart, Marquette, 225-1418; Rolf Swanson, Marquette, 228-6702; Douglas Welker, Pelkie, 338-2680. [All telephone numbers are Area Code 906.] Member Organizations of UPEC: Citizens Information Committee (Ontonagon County); Copper Country Audubon; Copper Country Citizens for Recycling; Copper Country League of Women Voters; Copper Country Peace Alliance; Dickinson Citizens for Clean Air; Mejedwa; Ottawa National Forest District Ranger; Recycle Marquette; Upper Peninsula Power Company. UPEC is a Member of: Great Lakes United; Michigan Environmental Council; Timber Wolf Alliance. Newsletter Staff: Dave Harmon, Atlantic Mine, Editor; Bob Linn, Hancock, Publisher.



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