

#4 Salmon Trout River

THREAT: ACID MINE DRAINAGE

Summary

The pristine Salmon Trout River, in the heart of one of Michigan's largest remaining wilderness areas, provides critical natural, economic, and drinking water benefits to the nearby communities and the region. A mining operation is poised to convert part of the Salmon Trout's headwaters into an industrial zone, creating a risk of acid mine drainage that could contaminate the river and seep into Lake Superior. Unless the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality (MDEQ) denies the operation's mining permit application, this recreational and natural jewel could be ruined.

The River

The Salmon Trout River flows through the Huron Mountains and empties into Salmon Trout Bay on Lake Superior. The headwaters of the river begin in the Yellow Dog Plains, known for its remoteness, wild areas, and abundant wildlife, such as moose and wolves. The Salmon Trout River is currently in excellent ecological health, and this vast expanse of forest and wetlands is one of the Midwest's few and most significant remaining wilderness areas. The river is home to the only known breeding population of the native coaster brook trout on Lake Superior's south shore. The plight of the coaster brook trout recently prompted several groups to petition for the species to be designated as endangered

THE SALMON TROUT RIVER, HOME TO THE RARE COASTER BROOK TROUT, EMPTIES DIRECTLY INTO LAKE SUPERIOR, THE MOST PRISTINE OF THE GREAT LAKES.



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under the Endangered Species Act.

Residents in the Salmon Trout watershed rely on the river and groundwater for part of their drinking water supply, including the use of public artesian wells. Tourism, fishing, and recreation account for 70 to 90 percent of the local economy. The river and surrounding areas contribute to the livelihood of the local Keweenaw Bay Indian Community, and is included in their Ceded Territories, established through a treaty in 1842. Within these territories, the Tribe retains traditional rights for hunting, fishing, and gathering.

The Threat

The Kennecott Minerals Company's proposed Eagle Project would convert roughly 92 acres of forest and wetlands at the Salmon Trout River's headwaters into an industrial zone. The underground mine would extract about four million tons of sulfide ore containing nickel and copper from bedrock below the surface. Kennecott, a subsidiary of London-based Rio Tinto, plans to operate the mine for six to eight years, and then spend another two years attempting to restore the area to its natural state.

When the high-sulfide ore comes in contact with air and water, it forms sulfuric acid. The acidic solution leaches harmful heavy metals, like copper and cobalt, creating what is commonly known as acid mine drainage. Rivers and groundwater become contaminated when acid mine drainage seeps from a mine site into the ground and streams.

The proposed mine poses a significant threat to the water quality of the Salmon Trout and nearby shores of Lake Superior.



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The mine has the potential to contaminate groundwater and the Salmon Trout with a harmful, toxic stew, adversely affecting the drinking water supply, local economies, recreational opportunities, and the rare coaster brook trout's habitat. Beyond the direct impacts on water quality, the construction of the mine would cause significant disruptions in what is now a sparsely populated area that is prized for its natural benefits that support local economies and provide critical habitat for wildlife.

What's At Stake

The Salmon Trout River flows through some of the most remote and pristine areas remaining in Michigan. Throughout the Salmon Trout River watershed, residents hunt, hike, fish, and depend on this healthy ecosystem for their economic livelihood. Such a large and remote tract of wilderness is not only an important economic resource, but also a cherished natural treasure to the people who live and visit here.

The threat of contamination from acid mine drainage is a concern in any sulfide mining operation, and the proposed Eagle Mine project is no exception. Because the ore body is located directly under



the river, and the mining site will be directly adjacent to this, any acid mine drainage that occurs would have a direct impact on river and groundwater quality. Such contamination in the river could bring serious harm to water quality — potentially contaminating the drinking water supply, and seriously harming the natural habitat of the unique native species. Even minute quantities of these toxins are deadly to juvenile coaster brook trout.

The 12-Month Outlook

The Kennecott Company submitted a permit application February 21, 2006. A public hearing will be held on April 18, and a second hearing is being planned. MDEQ should deny Kennecott's permit because this proposed mine would set a dangerous precedent for the development of more, risky sulfide mining in Michigan.



CENTRAL LAKE SUPERIOR WATERSHED PARTNERSHIP

KENNECOTT'S PROPOSED MINE COULD BRING HEAVY INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT TO ONE OF THE MIDWEST'S LARGEST WILDERNESS AREAS, DEPRIVING COMMUNITIES AND WILDLIFE OF DRINKING WATER, RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES, AND HABITAT.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO TAKE ACTION:
[HTTP://WWW.AMERICANRIVERS.ORG/ENDANGEREDRIVERS](http://www.AmericanRivers.org/EndangeredRivers)

