



September 10, 2012

Ms. Anne Hurlburt
City Administrator
City of Scandia
14717 209th Street North
Scandia, MN 55073

Re: Zavoral Mining and Reclamation Project
Comments on Final Environmental Impact Statement

Dear Ms. Hurlburt:

On behalf of the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA), I thank you for the opportunity to provide you with comments on the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the proposed Zavoral Mining and Reclamation Project.

Since 1919, NPCA has been the leading voice of the American people in protecting and enhancing our National Park System, working together with our more than 750,000 members and supporters nationwide to preserve our nation's natural, cultural and historic heritage for future generations. NPCA has a longstanding interest in protecting our national parks and their resources, both inside the park and on adjacent lands, and we are particularly interested in the proposed Zavoral Mining and Reclamation Project and its potential impacts on the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway.

We have reviewed the FEIS and the responses to the concerns we raised in our comments on the Draft EIS. We believe the FEIS is still inadequate as it fails to take into consideration the special status of the St. Croix River as a unit of the National Park System and the true impacts of the noise from the mine on this national resource. On behalf of our members and supporters, NPCA does not support this gravel mine because operation of the mine will generate commercial noise on the river, which will disrupt the values for which the St. Croix River was given federal protections. Because the FEIS fails to document this impact, the City should find that the FEIS is not complete.

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Noise

The FEIS continues to acknowledge that mining noise would be audible on the St. Croix National Scenic Riverway. The National Park Service has raised several concerns about the operation of this mine, including increased noise, and is thus opposed to the issuance of a permit for its operation. We concur.

In the City's response to comments regarding noise concerns, it was pointed out there are already certain manmade noises in the area, including motor boats, and that in practical terms, operation of this mine would mean a person could hear the mine in addition to a passing motor boat and "other natural noises" while on the river. However, a motor boat is a recreational activity on a river that has been federally recognized for its recreational values. Mining, which involves truck hauling and operation of other heavy equipment, is a commercial activity.¹ The analysis fails to take into consideration the type of noise generated by the mine. The noise from a commercial gravel mine is clearly not a noise that recreational users of the river would anticipate hearing during their trip on this Wild and Scenic River.

Since the operation of this mine will be audible on the river and it is a type not currently heard by users, the analysis should document the negative impact this commercial noise will have on the St. Croix given its special status under federal and state law and specific purpose as a recreational and scenic asset. Additionally, consideration should be given to how this noise will impact this valuable and sensitive landscape as a whole, which contains several other designations of significant value, including a MnDNR-designated Regionally Significant Ecological Area, the Rustrum Wildlife Management Area, and St. Croix Bluffs Important Bird Area (Audubon designation). In order to gauge the importance of each of these sites, we have included the "*Franconia/Scandia River Corridor Rich in Resources*," prepared by the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources.

Future Uses

We indicated in our previous comments that assurances must be made that any future mining of this site for other materials would be prohibited. The mine sits atop sandstone, which has been mined for use in hydraulic fracturing and may be sought out for mining purposes following the gravel mining operation. In the City's responses to comments on the Draft EIS, the City acknowledged that should a permit be granted for this gravel mine, it will be restricted to this project only and that any future mining permits would need to comply with the Development Code at the time. We thank you for clarifying the restricted scope of the project.

¹ The FEIS even recognizes that the existing manmade noises on the river are recreational. FEIS, 4.15.4.1, Affected Environment, p. 4-100.

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Conclusion

The FEIS is incomplete and lacks the comprehensive analysis necessary for the City of Scandia to make an informed decision on whether to allow operation of this mine. The St. Croix River is federally-protected and enjoyed for its scenic and recreational values, but the analysis fails to document the negative impact of the mine's commercial noise on this important resource. NPCA does not support operation of this mine because of these impacts.

We thank you for the opportunity to submit comments on the FEIS for the proposed mine.

Kindest regards,



Christine R. Goepfert
Upper Midwest Program Manager

Enc: "*Franconia/Scandia River Corridor Rich in Resources*," Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, June 2009.

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