

David J. Tomassoni

State Senator - District 6

President Pro Tem

Chair - Higher Education Finance & Policy Committee



Senate

State of Minnesota

August 12, 2021

Commissioner Sarah Strommen
Minnesota Department of Natural Resources
500 Lafayette Road
St Paul, MN 55155

Re: Twin Metals Minnesota Status Briefings

Dear Commissioner Strommen:

As you well know, our area is rich in natural resources. As such, much of our economy is driven by large mining and forest products operations that are heavily regulated and often require environmental review as they build and expand. Project proposers must accept the reality that Minnesota's regulatory processes are complicated and public and are often frustratingly time consuming. It is our job as elected officials and your job as a regulator to ensure that those processes are fair, efficient and effective. We are concerned that work on the Twin Metals Minnesota (TMM) EIS is taking longer than usual, and we are committed to working with you to ensure that the process gets back on track.

It is unacceptable that Twin Metals filed their data submittal with the DNR to start the environmental review process in December of 2019, and it now appears that the DNR will not even complete the scoping process for the EIS before the end of 2022. The average time in scoping for three past major projects -- Polymet, U.S. Steel's Keetac expansion and the Minnesota Steel project near Nashwauk -- was 304 days. If there is not a single additional day of delay on the Twin Metals project, it will be over three years just for the scoping process.

COVID aside, that lack of progress is particularly concerning given that the DNR hired a contractor to work on the project last March and has spent over \$800,000 of TMM's money on environmental review tasks.

Completing the EIS in a timely fashion is our goal and we are certain it is the goal of the DNR as well, but we need to start making some progress as a big part of this project is accessing our school trust lands, not to mention feeding our new age economy with badly needed precious metals.

Our commitment is to work closely with you to ensure that the process will now proceed in the fair, efficient and effective way that is expected of a state agency. We request that we begin this work by meeting with you or your designated Deputy or Assistant Commissioner to receive a full briefing on the work that has been and will be done on the EIS. In addition to a description of the work completed to date, we request that the briefing include a comprehensive schedule of key milestones to complete scoping the EIS and preparation of the Draft EIS for public comment. We also request that include a plan and schedule for public and tribal outreach and coordination.

In addition, we request that you instruct your key staff to meet with us on a bi-monthly basis after our first meeting so we can maintain an up-to-date and clear understanding of the status of EIS tasks and schedule, including any schedule changes that you decide are appropriate.

Finally, at our meeting we want to discuss the importance of coordinating the DNR EIS with the federal EIS on the Twin Metals project. We strongly prefer that the DNR move forward with a joint state/federal EIS as has been done on other major mining projects. If you believe that is not possible or advantageous, we look forward to discussing how the DNR will ensure us, Twin Metals and the public that the preparation of separate EISs will be done in a way that ensures an open, transparent and efficient process for completion.

Our communities have benefited from a natural resource-based economy for generations, and we are committed to making sure that future generations enjoy that benefit as well. The DNR is an important partner in protecting those resources and ensuring the success of our natural resource-based economy. We look forward to continuing in that spirit of partnership as the DNR does the important work of preparing an Environmental Impact Statement on the Twin Metals Minnesota project.

We will be in touch with your office to schedule our first meeting. We look forward to working with you and your staff on this important project.

Sincerely,



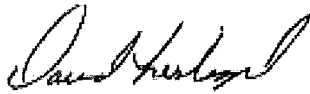
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Thomas M. Bakk
State Senator



Justin Eichorn
State Senator



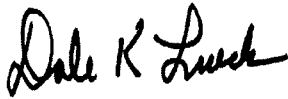
David Lislegard
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Rob Ecklund
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