

## Western Mesabi Mine Planning Board

### Recent Key Activities Summary for January 11, 2017 Laurentian Vision Partners Meeting

#### **Two transportation items are considered important:**

##### **Improvements to Highway 169:**

Construction work on a 1.5 mile section of current 2 lane highway east and west of Taconite, Minnesota, has been suspended until spring. WMMPB is now involved as a priority item in efforts to resume planning and consider possible alignment changes to the remaining 9 miles of the existing 2 lanes for upgrading to 4 lanes to complete the Cross Range Expressway.

##### **Captive Rail:**

WMMPB has been actively involved in the Regional Rail Initiative which has an objective of improving competitive freight rail options on the Mesabi Range. Current efforts have focused on West Range Connector studies. Funding is needed to resume the preliminary studies.

#### **Hill Annex Mine State Park:**

WMMPB members view the park as a priority, having potential to become a tourist destination site and providing important opportunities for mineral-related education while preserving accessibility to its substantial iron ore resources for future mining. DNR funding is important to make that happen. Much of the expense of operating the park involves internal DNR transfers.

#### **Improved efficiency of permitting and improved state and federal support for industry-needed infrastructure for economic developments:**

WMMPB understands the need for protections provided by laws, rules, and procedures related to permitting of new economic development and extensions of existing permits. However, WMMPB has also seen and experienced the costs of economic activities being delayed or cancelled due to burdensome permitting requirements. WMMPB feels that adjustments are needed to permitting requirements so that the major protective objectives of the laws and rules can be attained but doing this more efficiently so that there is confidence in the objectives of the permit requirements while improving the ability to bring positive economic developments to fruition. Federal and state support to develop and improve infrastructure needed for economic development is also needed.

#### **Correct state laws so that granting of conservation easements does not reduce income to local government units.**

##### **Priority planning:**

WMMPB members are reviewing their priorities and establishing committee structures and plans to achieve them.

As a footnote: members appreciated a recent presentation by Dave Dahl about base and precious metals in northeastern Minnesota, especially in Itasca County.