

# Lac Vieux Desert Band Of Lake Superior Chippewa Tribal Government

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## *Executive Officers:*

James Williams Jr., Tribal Chairman  
Samuel Klingman, Tribal Vice-Chairman  
Patrick Garrison, Tribal Treasurer  
Roxann McGeshick, Tribal Secretary



## *Council Members:*

Patrick Hazen II  
Jeffery McGeshick  
Tyrone McGeshick  
Henry Smith  
Keith Williams

February 12, 2025

## **VIA HAND DELIVERY & EMAIL**

Gogebic County Commissioners

200 Moore St.

Bessemer, MI 49911

RE: Opposition to Copperwood Mine – Official Position of the Lac Vieux Desert Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians

Dear Commissioners:

The purpose of this letter is to express the Lac Vieux Desert Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians' ("Tribe") vehement opposition to the proposed Copperwood mine near the Porcupine Mountains and Lake Superior. Although proponents of the mine have attempted to justify the mine's existence on economic grounds, the research does not support this premise. The Tribe respectfully requests that elected leaders charged with the duty to preserve and protect the interests of the residents of Gogebic County not be fooled by false promises and grand claims that will never come to fruition. While the text of the \$50 million dollar grant proposal<sup>1</sup> currently under consideration by the State of Michigan asserts that "380 direct mining jobs" would be created, as well as other half developed truths, the document clearly states that Cooperwood **hopes** to coincide its start-up date with the closure of Eagle Mine in Marquette County, thus allowing it to leverage the talent pool. In other words, they plan to scoop up workers from another county, not Gogebic County. Furthermore, in the grant, "new job" is defined as lasting for "six months," under two mutually exclusive categories: 1) jobs going to *residents*; 2) jobs going to *specialized non-residents*. We are not given percentages, but in the context of the studies mentioned above, it is highly unlikely that the immediate area will be benefited in the long term by "new jobs," and in fact, it is more likely that the converse would be true.

Indeed, the most comprehensive study ever conducted<sup>2</sup> — which analyzed "literally all of the relevant quantitative findings" — concluded that only 29% of mines, which met the criteria, led to a positive economic outcome for rural communities, with most of those positive cases

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.michiganbusiness.org/495b18/globalassets/documents/msf-board/msf-board-packets/march-2024-msf-board-packet---final\\_web-upload.pdf](https://www.michiganbusiness.org/495b18/globalassets/documents/msf-board/msf-board-packets/march-2024-msf-board-packet---final_web-upload.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.malheurco.org/wp-content/uploads/Departments/Planning/Documents/Calico/Attachment-B\\_Freudenberg-and-Wilson-Mining-The-Data.pdf](https://www.malheurco.org/wp-content/uploads/Departments/Planning/Documents/Calico/Attachment-B_Freudenberg-and-Wilson-Mining-The-Data.pdf)

occurring *before 1982*. A more recent study shows that negative effects are especially pronounced in areas prized for freshwater resources and outdoor recreation opportunities.<sup>3</sup> The study's author, Harvard Economist James Stock, former advisor to President Obama, summarizes: "In 89% of cases copper mining ends up being a negative for jobs and a negative for incomes."<sup>4</sup> To be sure. The contemplated mine would result in irreversible environmental risks to one of Michigan's most treasured natural areas and the largest of the Great Lakes and 10% of the planet's surface freshwater. This is a monumental concern that affects all tribal communities and should be of concern to elected leaders and community members living in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

Should the Copperwood Mine be allowed to proceed, you are gambling with our livelihood and the livelihood of future generations to enjoy the natural resources that define and surround us in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. What good is a new road with no one to travel on it? That road will only lead to the mine itself, and the mine's waste facility located dangerously close to Lake Superior, which incidentally will contain up to 30 million tons of toxic mine waste adjacent to this area's most pristine water source. The failure of the mine's dam could result in a catastrophic release of toxic chemicals, such as arsenic, cadmium, selenium, mercury, and lead into Lake Superior - an unprecedented environmental threat that must be avoided at all costs. Even if the dam holds, the mine is guaranteed to pollute. Ninety-Two percent (92%) of copper mines in the United States have failed to contain seepage and every single one of them has spilled toxic waste into the environment. Moreover, the mine's operation would disrupt the rich biodiversity of the Porcupine Mountains State Park and harm local outdoor recreation, which provides 12 billion dollars annually to Michigan's economy. The impacts of light, noise, air, and water pollution would extend far beyond the mine site, damaging the quality of life for residents and visitors alike. The North Country Trail, Black River Harbor, the Porcupine Mountains State Park, and nearby ecosystems all face harm from industrial mining activities that threaten the area's natural beauty and public safety.

The Tribe is already on record in its opposition to the Copperwood Mine through its Tribal Historic Preservation Officer's communication addressed to EGLE related to the Copperwood Resources, LLC Air Permits. The Tribe reaffirms that the Copperwood Mine will have catastrophic impacts on the Treaty of 1842 homelands and resources. Through the 1842 Treaty of La Pointe, the Tribe retained its inherent right to hunt, fish, trap, and gather on and over the lands and waters ceded to the United States – the proposed mine site is a part of that ceded territory. Further, the Tribe has not been afforded the opportunity to investigate, review or discuss any information regarding Cultural Resources or sacred sites within the project boundaries. To the best of our knowledge, the federally recognized Tribes in Michigan have had no input on any mitigation plan for Cultural Resource that will be directly and adversely impacted by the mine. Consistent with Michigan's obligation to protect natural resources from impairment, the Tribe's treaty rights must also be preserved through vigilant environmental stewardship. Contaminated landscapes persist in our region because of abdicated environmental responsibilities from past mining activities and Highland Copper's modern-day unpermitted activities, if supported, will continue that harmful legacy. Therefore, the Tribe urges you to prioritize the long-term well-being of our environment, our wildlife, and the economic sustainability of this region rather than be led toward a short-term,

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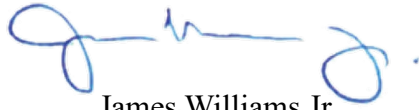
<sup>3</sup> <https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/stock/files/1-s2.0-s0921800919309954-main.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.kare11.com/article/news/politics/economist-sees-net-job-loss-from-bwca-mine/89-b93d2be4-7d42-4afa-a8ac-378161088ef8>

short-sighted solution. You must take a firm stand against this project to protect the future of our beloved region.

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter. If you have any questions or wish to discuss the position of the Tribe further, please contact me by email at [jim.williams@lvd-nsn.gov](mailto:jim.williams@lvd-nsn.gov) or by phone at 906-358-4577, ext. 4102.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "James Williams Jr.", written over a horizontal line.

James Williams Jr.  
Tribal Chairman

cc: LVD Council, LVD Legal, Watersmeet Township Supervisor