



Friends of the Land of Keweenaw

Grassroots Stewards of the Western Upper Peninsula

FOLK is a regional grassroots organization that advocates for greater awareness of the interrelationships of environmental, economic and social concerns to protect and preserve the ecological integrity of the Lake Superior watershed.

WINTER 2023 – 2024 NEWSLETTER

Years ago, FOLK searched for ways to reach out to our area youth for programs that cultivated environmental stewardship, conservation, and love of our lakes and land. The board found the Lake Superior Stewardship Initiative to make that connection. FOLK makes yearly financial contributions to this vital community resource.

Area Youth as Lake Superior Stewards by Lloyd Wescoat, LSSI

The Lake Superior Stewardship Initiative (LSSI) connects Western UP K-12 schools and communities in the stewardship of Lake Superior and its watershed. We engage our community with the following actions: on-going mentorship for teachers, connecting classrooms to community partners with expertise and knowledge in topics they're studying, supporting outdoor learning opportunities for students, and designing and facilitating professional learning for teachers.



Vermicomposting at Arvon School

LSSI provides mini-grant support for stewardship projects designed by teachers and their students that fulfill a community need and address grade level curriculum standards. This year's mini-grants fund projects such as school gardens, stream sampling investigations, beach cleanups, invasive species studies, and a project focusing on erosion caused by stormwater runoff. Through this work, students learn the importance of collaboration, problem-solving, and self-efficacy as they make an impact on their own communities. LSSI's goal is to prepare K-12 students to become knowledgeable citizens concerned about the Lake Superior watershed and become actively engaged in stewardship projects in their community.

We rely upon the innovation of our teachers, the knowledge of our community partners, the unique outdoor learning spaces in our region, and the support of our funders to make this happen. LSSI seeks grants from agencies such as the Great Lakes Fisheries Trust, Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes, and Energy, but also relies upon donations from individuals and organizations. **We thank FOLK for past support**, which has afforded us the ability to provide place-based learning opportunities to students in the Western U.P.

Keep the UP Wild

The Environmental Law and Policy Center and FOLK continue to collaborate, along with other stakeholders on the Wilderness proposal in the western UP that Doug Welker had worked to develop for nearly 20 years. Horst Schmidt and Catherine Andrews presented testimony via Zoom at a Michigan Natural Resources Sub-Committee Hearing last October in support of the designation. They also lobbied Senator Stabenow when she was in Houghton last fall. Updates on the campaign can be found at keeptheupwild.com. FOLK members and friends are encouraged to fill out cards of support on the website. Thanks to everyone who has already done so!

"In the end, our society will be defined not only by what we create, but by what we refuse to destroy."
John Sawshill (1936-2000) President, The Nature Conservancy (1990-2000).

“Eye-Opening, A Life Time Experience, A Blast”

The Lake Superior Youth Symposium (LSYS) is a biennial event hosted by different higher education institutions surrounding Lake Superior. The purpose of the symposium is to inspire and motivate teachers and students in grades 8-12 to become stewards of Lake Superior and the Great Lakes. Last spring, twenty-three students from the western UP attended this event at Northland College in Ashland, WI.

Students enjoyed field trips to the Red Cliff Fishery, Copper Falls State Park, Apostle Islands, and National Lakeshore Sea Caves. Other activities included organic food production and composting, stormwater runoff education, plant foraging, and a lacrosse game with students from the nearby Bad River Tribe. **FOLK** was one of many donors to make this opportunity happen for our area high school students.

Student comments:

“This was an experience of a lifetime & I learned so much.”

“I had a blast learning about Native traditions.”

“This symposium was so much fun. I learned a lot about the watershed & how I can help preserve it!

“This was such an eye-opening experience into my future & how much I love this place I live.”



Students removing lake garbage – courtesy LSYS

Thank You Adopt-A-Highway Angels by Rosemary Grier, Adopt-A-Highway coordinator

Since the beginning of Michigan’s Adopt-A-Highway Program in 1990, FOLK volunteers have been diligent in keeping a section of US 41 in Baraga County beautiful. Over the course of thirty-three years, we have picked up over 1,000 bags of trash that humans have disrespectfully thrown out vehicle windows.

In 1990, FOLK became one of the first Adopt-A-Highway programs in the Keweenaw after a successful application submitted to the state by Connie Julien. She organized volunteers to keep a four mile stretch clean on south US 41 on the Houghton/Baraga County line. Later on, with John Evans as coordinator, FOLK downsized to a two-mile section due to waning volunteer numbers. Rosemary Grier took over as coordinator ten years ago. The volunteer group continued to grow smaller, in large part due to the physical challenges that come with aging, making it difficult to pick up trash.



Left to right: Catherine Paavola, Connie Sherry, Rosemary Grier, Dave Rulison, Scott Rutherford, Linda Rulison, and Doug Welker (2016)



Left to right: Highway Angels - Becky Darling, Catherine Andrews, Linda Rulison, Marj Krumm, Rosemary Grier & Connie Sherry (not pictured), 2023.

Over the past few years, our small group of dedicated “highway angels” have continued to meet three times a summer to perform the highway clean-up duties. With a shortage of new volunteers, the group decided it was time to pass this opportunity on to another group. Last fall, Green Timber Consulting Foresters took over FOLK’s two-mile stretch where their business is located.

I want to THANK our volunteers over the past 33 years, particularly our current special volunteer “Angels” for being part of the clean-up crew during the last six years and keeping our

highways clean.

Forest Ownership in the Western UP - Past and Present by Catherine Andrews

Small pockets of protected old-growth forests, reminiscent of the early 1800s, can still be experienced by the discerning wanderer. One just has to know where to look. Most large tracts of forestland are in various forms of recovery from the white pine clearcuts of the 1800s and hardwood clearcuts of the early 1900s.



**Old Growth White Pine stand –
Estivant Pines**

During the 1900s, State and Federal forests as well as forests owned by local timber companies like Mead, were managed to supply local mills. The idea was that, if managed correctly, the forest would provide good jobs and contribute to a robust economy for many years. It was common to see healthy stands of uneven aged mixed hardwoods managed to be selectively harvested as saw logs. Models of exemplary forest stewardship could be found depending upon who owned the land. Many of us took for granted the freedom to roam for miles on ungated logging roads, discovering hidden lakes, streams, and waterfalls. Old-growth trees could still be found in some riparian areas and on steep slopes and rugged terrain before more advanced machinery came along and economic pressures increased. Clearcuts were once an uncommon and often “shocking” sight, before “even-aged” management became a more common practice.

Changes began to occur, gradually at first, and by the early 2000s outside companies discovered our forests. Names like Weyerhaeuser and GMO Threshold Timber Corporation popped up. They appeared to be timber companies but turned out to be Real Estate Investment Trusts (REITs) and they had no long-term interest in the land. These two companies have already moved on after selling out to other private investment “vehicles.” For example, in 2017, GMO Threshold sold their U.P. “holdings” to TRG, which is part of the Rohatyn Group “dedicated to pursuing investment opportunities by *focusing on areas of structural inefficiencies and special opportunity.*” Now we know their particular perspective on the land we call home. TRG also acquired Keweenaw Land which had long been well known for good management practices. According to a local professional forester, these forest lands are being high graded; removing the highest value species which impacts future natural regeneration, with no discernable consequence to the absentee owners. Long-term sustainability management practices have little priority in short-term business models of global corporations.

Plum Creek (a REIT) purchased Mead West Vaco in 2005 (Mead was founded in 1846). Weyerhaeuser merged with Plum Creek in 2016, (Weyerhaeuser’s shareholders include Vanguard, Black Rock, JP Morgan Chase, etc.). Then, Weyerhaeuser Hardwoods Division was purchased by American Industrial Partners, a Private Equity Co. in 2018. By 2019 Weyerhaeuser’s UP holdings were sold to Lyme Timber, a Timber Investment Management Organization headquartered in New Hampshire.

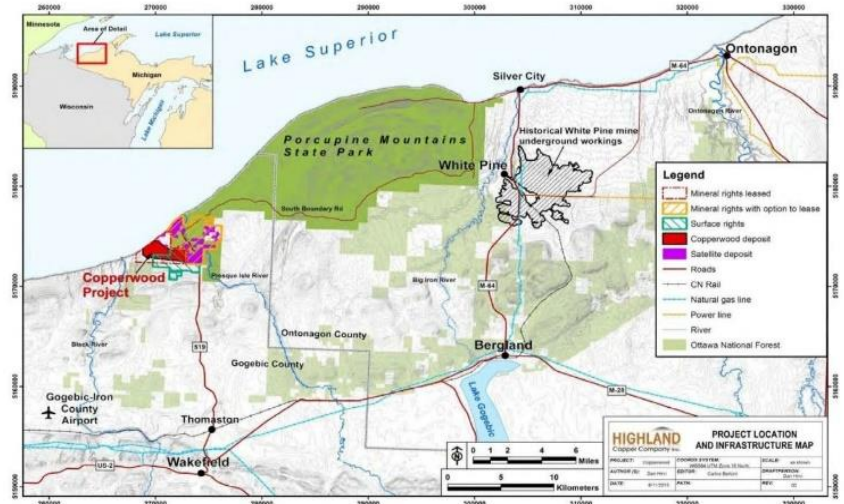
One thing that many of these companies have in common, besides owning the land for a very short time, is that they sell off the most valuable (aesthetic) assets. This is called parcelization of land and causes fragmentation, reduces wildlife habitat and cuts off public access. They’re also known to high-grade the timber, clearcut hardwoods (even aged management) and convert to off-site Red Pine or hybrid Aspen. Converting the land to other species requires herbicides to reduce competition for the new seedlings. Aspen saplings are often encased in plastic tubing which entraps warblers and other birds looking for insects to eat. Professional foresters don’t always mark the trees to be cut in a timber sale, trusting the loggers to decide what to cut and what to leave behind. If loggers overcut, they will not be hired again.

Timber and pulp prices have been trending down globally which is difficult for local loggers and their families. That’s painful to know, especially when it is likely that the big investment companies buying and selling the land and its treasure will leverage their assets to benefit themselves and their shareholders. The more nature is monetized, the more precarious the future will be for the land and all of us.

Mining Dangers in the Western U.P. by Horst Schmidt

There are two mining projects near the Porcupine Mountains owned by the Canadian-based Highland Copper Company in partnership with Kinterra Copper; the **Copperwood Mine** on the western side of Porcupine Mountain Wilderness State Park and the proposed **White Pine North Mine project** (formerly the White Pine Mine) near the eastern side of the Porcupine Mountain Wilderness State Park (see image below).

The Copperwood sulfide mine project is fully permitted and has already logged a large area for a proposed tailings dam. It has consolidated multiple streams on its property into one large unnatural channel. Should it build the tailings dam, its failure would release the toxic substances down the channel into Lake Superior. The near shore currents would move the toxic-laden chemical mix eastward along the south shore of the lake. The Copperwood Mine is adjacent to both the North Country Trail and Porcupine Mountains Wilderness State Park, making it the closest sulfide mine to Lake Superior in history. White Pine North Mine project is in the preliminary economic assessment state.



Fortunately, a new generation of mining opponents is taking on new and old mining projects throughout the UP, northern Wisconsin, and NE Minnesota. For example, Tom Grotewohl formed *Protect the Porkies* in response to the dangers of the Copperwood Mine development to educate and show people how they can take action today to help the campaign. He provides valuable information and updates, as he lives in the area and regularly cruises the site. To learn more, please go to: <https://protecttheporkies.com/>

Talon Metals Corporation was approved a mineral lease to explore for nickel deposits under 23,000 acres in Baraga, Houghton, Iron and Marquette counties, by the Michigan Department of Natural Resources on January 31, 2024. This acreage represents the largest such subsurface mineral lease approval in Michigan since state regulators approved initial drilling for Eagle Mine near Ishpeming, MI. The approval follows Talon's 2022 acquisition of mineral rights to explore for deposits on 400,000 of private acres in the UP that was owned by the Ford Motor Company.

Eagle Mine announced they were getting ready to close in 2027, but recently said they plan to extend the life of the mine by two years, based on nickel and copper demand for EV batteries. Currently, Eagle plans to take the waste rock and cement it back into the mined tunnels. It is hard to tell if they are being environmentally conscious or they are running out of space at the tailings pond in Humboldt Township.

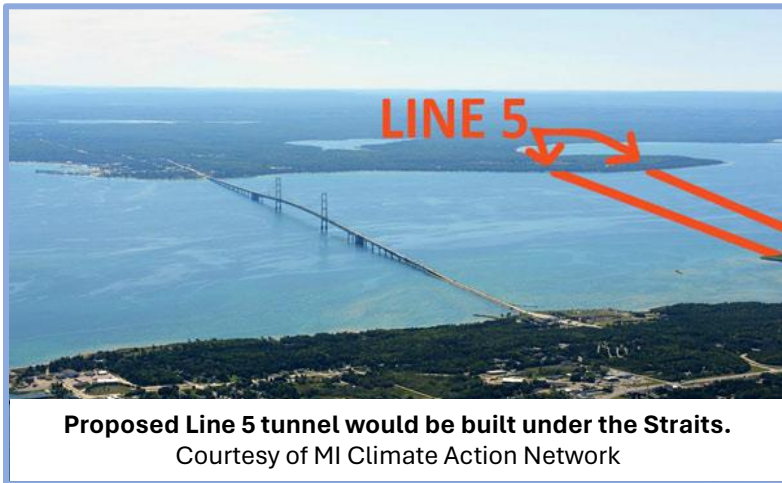
Recently, there has been a slackening in demand for electric vehicles, which has led Ford to state they are cutting back on production of the vehicles. Most likely we will see more hiccups in the transition to electrification as predictions run into reality, which includes demand for metals.

Stop the Rocket Succeeds

FOLK supports Citizens for a Safe and Clean Lake Superior (CSCLS), the non-profit group formed to fight the proposed rocket launch site at Granot Loma location just north of Marquette, MI on Lake Superior. This grassroots organization formed in 2020 with the support of local residents, organizations, businesses, and regional groups. CSCLS President Dennis Ferraro announced in November 2023 that the Powell Township Board passed a Resolution making it clear that a rocket launch site at Granot Loma was unlawful and prohibited under the township's Zoning Ordinance. Congratulations to CSCLS and its many supporters. Never underestimate the power of a grassroots movement! For more info: <https://citizensforsuperior.org>

Line 5 Tunnel – Setbacks Galore by Rosemary Grier

In an unfortunate action taken by the Michigan Public Service Commission in December 2023, a significant permit for the giant Canadian oil company, Enbridge, was approved, positioning it one step closer for constructing the controversial Line 5 tunnel project. This granted permission to re-route a 4-mile section for the 645-mile pipeline transporting crude oil and natural gas liquids into an untested concrete tunnel beneath the straits near the Mackinac Bridge.



Environmental organizations and Michigan Native American tribes condemned the decision, saying the project would violate tribal treaty rights and lock in decades more of fossil fuel dependency at a time when scientists say humanity must rapidly switch to green energy or face dire climate consequences. They also say Enbridge has not proven that it can drill or operate the tunnel safely. According to Sean McBrearty, state director from *Clean Water Action*, “The best climate scientists are telling us we have a very short window to decrease carbon emissions.”

Before the mega-infrastructure tunnel project can go forward, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers must complete its investigation for a permit, which will take years. The tunnel also needs permits from the Michigan Department of Environment, Great Lakes and Energy whose issues are on appeal. In addition, the federal court in Wisconsin has ordered Line 5 to be shut down in less than three years, plus the MI Attorney General is still suing to shut down the 70-year-old Line 5 in state court.

Take Action: Sign this petition to urge President Biden to act to protect the Great Lakes and climate from America's Most Dangerous Pipeline: https://www.oilandwaterdontmix.org/line_5_presidential_petition

Citizens For Local Choice by Catherine Andrews

In a disappointing action, the Michigan Legislature passed a Bill that removes the right of local residents to make important land use decisions regarding industrial wind and solar projects using their own zoning ordinances. Eighty-seven percent of Michigan residents support local control of these decisions.

Public Act 233 of 2023, passed on November 29, 2023, includes Part 8 of the Clean and Renewable Energy Waste and Reduction Act, which transfers Township Zoning authority to the 3-member, Governor appointed, Michigan Public Service Commission if local zoning is more restrictive than recently written State guidelines. The legislation was passed to “resolve delays, debate, and litigation at the local level.” Some would say that it *prevents* delays, debate, and litigation and accelerates the permitting process by excluding input from local residents.

Citizens for Local Choice is a bi-partisan, state-wide organization whose mission is to give Michigan residents the opportunity to vote to repeal Part 8 and regain local control over industrial wind and solar projects and large battery storage facilities.

Petition language was approved by the Board of Canvassers on January 19, 2024 and the final petition was accepted from the State. The petitions are being distributed to County Captains throughout the state, with 356,958 valid signatures needed from registered voters to be collected by May 29th. The goal is to collect 550,000 signatures. Anyone interested in getting involved in donating or requesting petitions, visit:

www.micitizenschoice.org

Membership Form

FOLK - Friends of the Land of Keweenaw
PO Box 671 Houghton, MI 49931

FOLK Board

Linda Rulison – President
Catherine Andrews – VP
Horst Schmidt – Treasurer
Rosemary Grier – Secretary
Dave Rulison – Member-at-large
Board Openings: *could be you!*

Please print: Name _____

Address _____ City _____

State _____ Zip _____

Email _____ Phone (____) _____ Date _____

- Individual (Annual Membership/Jan-Dec): \$10
- Senior Citizen, Unemployed, Student (Annual): \$5
- Contribute to FOLK's mission to protect the integrity of Lake Superior's Watershed \$ _____
- I want to get involved with FOLK! Please contact me by: (circle one) email or phone.
- Total enclosed: \$ _____

Comments/Suggestions: _____



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Sustainability Film & Discussion Series

Now in its 14th year, the Sustainability Film & Discussion Series continues to bring relevant & provocative film to Michigan Tech's (MTU) campus. The Series provides an opportunity for people of diverse ages, backgrounds & life experiences to engage in meaningful discussion facilitate by a local expert on the topic.

The film series is coordinated by the MTU Office of Sustainability & Resilience. **FOLK** is one of the film sponsors. Film schedule: <https://blogs.mtu.edu/sustainability/2024/01/22/2024-sustainability-film-series/>