

My name is Joe Baltich, I'm from Ely Minnesota. I am a small business owner who operates Northwind Lodge, a family-oriented wilderness resort that has existed since my grandfather built the first cabin on Jasper Lake in 1939. I live 15 miles northeast of Ely surrounded by the Boundary Waters Canoe Area border on three sides. In conjunction with the resort, I have spent 35 years in wilderness canoe trip outfitting and guiding and we ran a cross country ski center. I am also an artist who paints fine art and like many other people who have spent their entire lives in Ely, my third job is as a busdriver for the Ely Independent School District 696.

As a tourism operator, I am exposed first-hand to the impact tourism has on the Ely area. 45 years of working in tourism proves it will always be a fluid, feast or famine business. When I was a kid, like many other resort owners, my dad also was employed as a police officer for the city of Ely. He also guided fishing trips and trapped on the side. During my early years, our family food supply was often supplemented by hunting and fishing. Based on my life experience and observations, tourism alone will never carry the region. It just can't.

Upon graduating from college in the early 80's, I ran for office and was elected as mayor of Ely. During that time, we were coming off of a bad economic recession. Reserve Mine in neighboring Babbitt had closed for good which resulted in 1300 families leaving Ely. As city council members we were tasked with finding a viable industry to keep our people employed. We found that due to Ely's remote location, the high cost of shipping stifled competitiveness. Ely ended up relying on non-taxpaying governmental entities to become limited job providers and, of course, we had summer tourism and some logging. Today, as is evident in the empty homes and storefronts that now still line our streets, we are still struggling. In Ely, Goodwill couldn't even make it when selling a free inventory. Accordingly, I will say the pandemic flurry of activity will be fleeting as well.

Iron ore from Ely and the Range was consequential to winning World War II and also rebuilding war torn Europe and Japan in years following. After 88 years of unregulated massive iron mining into the early 70's, the federal government found our most precious resource - our water- to be pristine enough to create the designated wilderness park, the Boundary Waters Canoe Area. We were all told the highly restrictive BWCA was going to be a big draw for tourism, but with about 100,000 visitors to the park per year spread over 6 different access regions and limited travel permits, that was a lot of baloney. Meanwhile, there are constant environmental lawsuits directed at mines for supposed BWCA pollution. Living next to this park feels like having a perpetually vindictive dog waiting to bite us for some environmentalist-perceived infraction. Despite alleged dust and water from mining, our water is still clean, the air is fantastic, and the fishing is still awesome. We have abundant wildlife. This despite all the claims against the mining industry which has operated for far longer than the Boundary Waters has existed. Like slip & fall attorneys, I'm convinced that environmentalists mainly litigate for cash flow.

Given the market-based volatility of the taconite industry, mining diversity is sensible. Copper nickel would add regional stability to the Range. Filling the need for critical minerals -mined and controlled inside the United States- for national defense is just plain smart. With the massive tax dollars that would benefit ALL Minnesotans, the gains to the Minerals Trust fund for schools and the strong market demand, copper nickel mining is the way of our current and distant future.

The year is 2023, not 1955. Modern mining technology and local miners are fully capable of performing well at both Polymet and Twin Metals. A current example of successful modern day copper mining "in a water-rich environment" is Eagle mine in western Marquette county, Michigan. They literally began mining copper in 2014 under Obama's EPA and have expanded their underground operations since. How come they can do it?

Ely is sitting on an estimated \$550 Billion dollars in Copper Nickel. I want to see 200 and more,

year-round-employed copper nickel miners making \$85,000 per year while shopping in the region and at Ely's grocery store so it's still there when I'm 80. Copper mining will actually improve the tourism industry. Just like Red Lake Ontario where for 40 years they've mined gold immediately next to their beautiful Woodland Caribou park, our Boundary Waters will remain as it is today, beautiful and inaccessible. Based on our state and federal laws and regulations plus an experienced, proud, workforce, there is no rational reason that says Americans, namely Iron Rangers can't get this done right. We can and we will. Thank you.