

Anti-mining summit held

Gathering steam

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MARQUETTE - Al Gedicks of the University of Wisconsin LaCrosse said through "Protect the Earth" gatherings such as the kind held in Marquette this weekend a proposal for an underground zinc-copper-lead mine in Crandon, Wis., was stopped in 2003.

"We learned from each other," Gedicks said during his presentation at the "Protect the Earth Summit," organized by the local environmental group Save the Wild U.P. on Saturday. "We developed trust based upon a common goal to stop the project."

The summit was held to bring together communities concerned over metallic sulfide or uranium mining and was motivated by a nickel and copper mine planned for the Yellow Dog Plains near Big Bay.

Gedicks - author of several books, including one on indigenous land and mineral issues - spoke to a crowd of 40 people from all over the Midwest and Canada about how communities can come together and successfully protect their lands.

Gedicks focused his arguments around the metallic mine initially proposed by Exxon in the 1970s in northeastern Wisconsin near the city of Crandon. Gedicks said the mine was proposed in a water rich area and could have affected communities 40 miles downstream.

Five American Indian tribes owned land bordering the proposed mine area, he said. Through an organized effort of tribal members, rural residents, farmers, labor unions and students, the mine was never build, he said.

"We presented the mining industry with a coalition they had never seen before," Gedicks said. "They were shocked that we had a global reach just like they do."

In the 20-year battle, the environmental movement against the Crandon mine proposal became so prominent that even people in South Africa and Australia - who had been affected by other mining projects - supported the fight, Gedicks said.

In 1998 Wisconsin approved a mining moratorium that caused Exxon to pull out of the state, Gedicks said. He added that Wisconsin is now on the bottom of the list for states giving reception to mining industries. Michigan is not on the list.

In 2003, the Mole Lake Sokaogon Chippewa and the Forest County Potawatomi tribes purchased the proposed mine site and later 5,000 acres near the site.

"No one is ever going to develop a mine in Crandon," Gedicks said. "This was the first time anywhere in the world a large cooperation was defeated."

Gedicks said that despite the diversity of people in race, class and region, they overcame their differences because they fought a common goal. In fact, he said native communities and "white" communities that had been battling over treaty rights for fishing and hunting, were brought closer together.

Bob Tammen of Soudan, Minn., said he agreed with Gedicks' presentation. He added that there are proposed metallic sulfide mines in Minnesota that he and others are fighting.

Rosemary Grier of Houghton attended the summit with several friends as part of Friends of the Land of Keweenaw.

Grier said her community successfully fought a proposed paper pulp mill along Keweenaw Bay in 1990.

"That did not go in because of education on the issue," she said, emphasizing that truthful education on both sides of an issue is crucial. "Information is power. That's what all of us need to make: educated decisions on how we live and what we do."

The Summit continues this morning with a walk to Eagle Rock in the Yellow Dog Plains - a spot near the site of the planned metallic sulfide mine.