

# Michigan DEQ hears support for Copperwood mining project

By CORTNEY OFSTAD  
cofstad@yourdailyglobe.com

IRONWOOD TOWNSHIP — There was a common theme during the public hearing held by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality at the Lindquist Center at Gogebic Community College on Wednesday.

“We need jobs, now.”

Residents from Gogebic, Ontonagon and area counties spoke in support of the proposed Orvana Copperwood Project, in front of a crowd of more than 200 people.

“I’m glad that people took the time to come out and show their support,” Jim Jacques, director of engineering and mining, said. “We did a lot of work to make sure that people were aware of the public meeting. We sent out mailings, emailed, called, made a lot of contacts and made everyone aware of the fact that it was taking place. The fact that we had this many people show up and provide as many positive comments, good, quality comments. I’ve been impressed.”

The Copperwood Project calls for a copper mine in Ironwood and Wakefield townships. The proposed mine is estimated to create more than 500 jobs locally, with the mine lasting 14 years.

Ironwood, Wakefield and Bessemer township officials pledged their support after passing resolutions in support of the project. Bessemer, Ironwood and Wakefield cities also spoke of the support from their boards



Cortney Ofstad/Daily Globe

**More than 200** area residents attend a public hearing hosted by the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality on Wednesday at Gogebic Community College. The hearing was held for MDEQ to hear comments on Orvana Resource’s Copperwood Project, a proposed copper mine in Wakefield and Ironwood townships.

on the project. The Gogebic County Board also approved of the project.

“I’ve been impressed with the support from all of the communities. I think that it’s great,” Jacques said.

The MDEQ also review permits by Orvana to make sure that the project will be

environmentally sound.

“I drove up here, because I feel like a lot of people, that this mine is a good thing,” Norm Pestka, of Ontonagon, said. “Environmental problems aren’t going to happen

(See COPPERWOOD — Page 2)

# COPPERWOOD

---

(Continued from Page 1)

with this company. It's not an issue with the way government officials are watching and regulating things now a days. It won't be an issue. We need jobs, and we need jobs bad. We need to support this whole-heartedly."

According to Andy Hill, publisher of the Wakefield News/Bessemer Pick and Axe, the area hit its peak population in 1925.

Some spoke of how younger residents leave to find jobs in other areas.

"With 28 years in the Ironwood Area Schools, I see the brightest and smartest leave," Tim Kolesar, superintendent, said. "We want to keep our kids."

Keith Johnson, director of the Western Upper Peninsula Michigan Works office in Gogebic County, spoke on the high unemployment rates he faces every day.

"I have the three worst counties in the 83 counties in Michigan for unemployment rates," Johnson said. "Gogebic has an unemployment rate of 11.3 percent, with 800 residents unemployed. The No. 1 thing that people don't see is the number of people leaving. That number will soon go up. Out of the unemployed people in the neighboring counties to this mine, will they all get jobs because of this? Some yes, and some no, but some will get indirect jobs because of it."

Michael Yon, fire chief in Wakefield, spoke on behalf of the department, saying it supports the mine. He also spoke of the benefits of mine.

"Personally, back in 1968, I was the product of the White Pine mine, and if it wasn't for that mine, I wouldn't be here," Yon said. "I have three daughters, and I want them to marry someone and stay here. I have a solid job with benefits, and many of

us can't say that. I know that Orvana will keep in the environment safe for not only me, but for my family and for everyone in this room."

Chris Lake, of Lake Brothers Excavating in Wakefield, has been working on the County Road 519 and on the mine site, but the project is a little more personal than that.

"My brother and I own property on three sides of the proposed mine site," Lake said. "We are in full support of this project."

The MDEQ will continue to study Orvana's 13 required permits, looking into the environmental aspect of the project, and how the company will restore the proposed mine site after the mining is complete.

All of the public comments were recorded for the MDEQ to evaluate. Written comments can also be submitted until 5 p.m. on Dec. 7.

"This is just another milestone that we have to go through," Jacques said. "We're continuing with the project, as far as feasibility studies. We're looking at improving aspects of it. Then, we're looking forward to working with MDEQ on the review process, making sure that we're answering questions that may have, and that we've provided them with a quality permit that they can easily approve."

*For more information, call Orvana Resources at 906-364-7577, or visit [orvana.com](http://orvana.com). To submit a written comment to the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality, email [DEQ-Copperwood@michigan.gov](mailto:DEQ-Copperwood@michigan.gov), or write to MDEQ, Office of Oil, Gas, and Minerals, 525 W. Allegan St., P.O. Box 30256, Lansing, MI 48909. To view the current permit being evaluated by the MDEQ, visit [michigan.gov/deq](http://michigan.gov/deq), or see a hardcopy in the library at Gogebic Community College in Ironwood.*