

LD 1495 Ought to Pass

To: Joint Committee on Environment and Natural Resources

From: Frederick Beck, Consulting geologist, Yarmouth, Maine

Subject: Support for Legislative Document LD 1495; **Resolve, Establishing the Commission to Study the Role of Critical Minerals as a Resource in the State.**

Maine has a long history of metal mining and legislative support and encouragement for responsible mining. Significant past producing metal mines have included lead mines in Lubec, silver mines in Sullivan and Acton, copper and zinc mines in the Blue Hill peninsula area and importantly, iron mines in several towns including Clinton and Shapleigh and the largest by far, Katahdin Iron Works northwest of Brownville Junction which produced iron for over 50 years during the 1800s.

All of these mines operated without any significant environmental oversight and the waste dumps still remain for all to see. It wasn't until 1969 that the first mine-specific law was adopted which required some form of reclamation.

To my knowledge, these old mine waste piles have not adversely impacted tourist visitation to the Towns in which the wastes reside, nor have real estate values in those towns suffered.

My first job in Maine was with the Maine Geological Survey in 1966. At that time the Survey was part of the Department of Economic Development (DED) with the specific directive to create and publish maps and reports of potentially economic mineral deposits and to undertake, at State expense, basic geochemical and geophysical surveys which would encourage mining exploration groups to conduct additional more detailed exploration for the metals which were of interest at the time, the base metals copper, lead and zinc as well as precious metals silver and gold. That "seed money" resulted in about 40 different companies investing millions of exploration dollars in Maine during the 1970s and 1980s and resulted in discovery of several important metal deposits, including the Bald Mountain, Ledge Ridge, Alder Pond and Mt. Chase deposits. The recently "re-discovered" Pennington Mountain rare earth elements (REEs) deposit in northern Aroostook County was discovered during those years as well. The Mt. Chase deposit has been renamed the Pickett deposit and is currently being studied for production by Wolfden Resources.

In 1955 the 97th Maine Legislature created the Maine Mining Bureau with the specific directive ". . . to encourage and administer the development of mineral resources on State land". In 1981 the 110th Maine Legislature created the Mining Excise Tax (MRS Title 36, Chapter 371). The preamble of that Law states: "*It is the Legislature's belief that mining for metallic minerals is an acceptable and necessary activity in the State . . .*"; the purpose of the law states: "*It is the policy of the State to encourage the sound and orderly development of Maine's mineral resources*".

As a follow-up of the above stated Policy and in view of the many bills which have been introduced to this session of the Legislature, as well as the changes which have taken place in our recognition of the importance of critical minerals to mitigate climate change and embrace the new “green economy”, it seems imperative that all parties concerned with mining in Maine be a part in developing the State’s overall mining policy for critical minerals and LD 1495 would appear to accomplish that ambitious goal.

It is important to note that according to the USGS, the United States is 100-percent dependent on imports for 21 critical mineral commodities and at least 50-percent dependent on imports for another 28 mineral commodities. Many of these come from countries not particularly friendly with the United States and in a few cases the metals (cobalt for example) are mined under appalling conditions by children and with little or no environmental regulation. Maine is unique in having occurrences of, and the potential for discovery of, a wide variety of the Federally listed critical minerals. Maine could play a role in changing these unsettling statistics.

Recommended Reading:

1. 1991; *Mining in Maine: Past, Present, and Future*. By Carolyn LePage, Michael Foley, and Woodrow Thompson. Available from the Maine Geological Survey, Augusta.
2. 2022; *Potential for Critical Mineral deposits in Maine, USA*. By John Slack et al, *Atlantic Geoscience* 58, 155-191. <https://doi.org/10.4138/atigeo.2022.007>.
3. 2022; *Volt Rush, the winners and losers in the race to go green*. By Henry Sanderson. Available in local bookstores or online.
4. 2023; *Cobalt Red, how the blood of the Congo powers our lives*. By Siddharth Kara. Available in local bookstores or online.