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Company secretive about work

Drillers hunting metals in waters near Hayward

By Tom Lawin

HAYWARD — Anglers who trek to waters of the Tiger Cat flowage east of here will have little difficulty detecting something new.

A derrick-like structure with a diesel engine on it is prying samples of the land beneath these well-known waters where fishermen tease lurking muskies, walleyes and bass.

Tempered drills are busy probing 1,000 feet beneath the bed of this 224-acre flowage in the Town of Round Lake, for precious metals.

The Department of Natural Resources has given permission to the giant International Minerals and Chemical Co. (IMC) of Libertyville, Ill. to drill 50 holes 1,000 feet into the flowage bed in search of what a company official says "could be several metals."

Few clues given

Project Director Don Everhart from IMC corporate headquarters near Chicago would neither confirm nor deny if the company was seeking clues of copper, lead, zinc or veins of other metals on grounds that "our plans really are so vague at this time that we can't say exactly what we are looking for."

He did say that the company secured "enough options" after conducting intensive aerial flights at low altitudes over the area. Options, he said, have been signed on more than 1,000 acres in Sawyer County.

"With intense competition for discovering new fields it is best we don't divulge what we are doing," said Everhart.

A U. S. Department of the Interior official, John Rigg, who is chief of that agency's metal mining division, predicts northern Wisconsin and northeastern Min-

nesota by the year 2000 will be the site of the largest copper and nickel producing areas in the U.S.

The area which includes the Tiger Cat flowage region, is underlain by an extension of the Canadian Shield, a massive formation of Precambrian rock that has yielded millions of tons of metallic ores in Canada.

Drilling of the 50 test holes, according to Everhart, will take three years or more and will cost IMC around \$500,000. The company has vast mineral and chemical holdings in the U. S., Africa, Mexico and Canada, with special emphasis on phosphate extraction in Saskatchewan and Florida.

Each core sample will have diameters of 3-6 inches and all drilling will occur in Sections 16 and 17 of Sawyer Co.

Obtained DNR approval

The company in November 1973 received permission from the Wisconsin DNR to conduct its drilling operations that will continue year around, with floats used in summer and the drilling machine to be supported by winter ice.

Included in the IMC environmental impact report was a letter from Dennis R. Keeney, associate professor in the UW - Madison Department of Soil Science, who advised IMC environmental protection division director Dr. E. L. Lantz:

"The impact of obtaining the small three inch core samples as you plan should result in minimal impact (on the flowage floor) which would not even be measurable within a matter of a few hours after taking the sample. It also would not affect the biota (animal and plant life.)"

Kenney's main concern was whether the drilling to

a depth of 1,000 feet below the flowage floor would release any natural gas from the substratum or open up artesian wells. This concern apparently was quieted by Dr. Meredith R. Ostrom, Wisconsin State Geologist, who notified Dr. Lantz that oil and gas are found in rocks younger than Precambrian and the only rocks in Sawyer Co. that fit this description are glacial deposits. Dr. Ostrom's assessment of the presence of oil or gas was that it was "extremely remote."

Yet, the DNR has issued a minimum of 16 rules IMC must follow when conducting its core drilling program now underway.

If bogs are dislodged, causing hindrance to navigation, wildlife and fish, IMC must rectify the situation at its own cost. Warning lights must be attached to the drilling rig as an aid to boaters; all spoil materials must be kept in leak-proof containers and disposed of in suitable on land areas; all pipe casings will be removed after each test hole is drilled and shall be filled and sealed in accordance with established DNR codes; any spillage of fuels must be reported at once to the DNR.

Drainage impoundment

Tiger Cat flowage, with a maximum depth of 11 feet, is a soft water drainage impoundment on the headwaters of the north fork of the Chief River. A 12-foot head water control structure at the outlet controls levels of Upper and Lower Twin Lakes, Burns Lake and Placid Lake. The fish population includes muskies, walleyes, bass and panfish. Rooted aquatic vegetation growth is extensive and numerous bogs and conifer-shrub swamp wetlands border the flowage.

Company environmentalists said "no long term or permanent disturbance of the environment is anticipated; the proposed project is of a temporary nature and it is believed that any effects would endure only as long as the project itself."

Noise levels from the drilling rig's diesel engine is comparable to a farm tractor, Everhart reported.

According to a company report filed with the DNR, "investigation has shown that the fish population actually increases around such a (drilling) rig during the time it is located and operated in an area of fish life."

Benefits listed

The company said in its environmental impact statement that "the potential benefits resulting from a subsequent mining operation would be to provide a source of domestic minerals, provide additional tax revenue and provide significant fulltime employment in an area where unemployment is a problem."

If a viable potential mining operation is indicated on the basis of extracted core samples, Everhart explained the metals would be extracted from beneath the bed of the Tiger Cat Flowage by digging a long tunnel at an angle from an entrance on land.

In summer, drilling platforms will be towed and pushed into place with a boat and motor; none of the drill sites are located on floating bogs, but some drilling will occur in swamp grass and - or lily pad beds.

If a boat cannot be used to spot the drilling rigs, then rigs will be put into place with use of a helicopter. In this operation some float-

ing bogs might be dislodged or broken up. The company has agreed to "collect and dispose of the bogs on shore."

Temporary turbidity of the water will result when the shaft is sunk into the flowage bottom or when helicopters are in use; company geologists estimate bedrock will be encountered 100 feet below the flowage floor.

Each of the 50 holes take 45-60 days to drill and costs will average about \$10 a foot, the company estimates.

Drilling operations are expected to be conducted around the clock until the 45 test holes are bored.