

## **Mining Will Offer a Bright Future to Marathon County**

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Although known today for its rich forests and farmlands, northern Wisconsin's roots are buried in mining. Here in Marathon County, there is an opportunity to help rediscover that history – along with a new generation of employment and sustained economic growth.

What this bright future requires is that we have open conversations and work together to find common ground.

Wisconsin recently instituted reforms that allow for mining and the economic benefits that come with it, while preserving the state's environment and natural resources. As a fourth-generation miner, I've seen firsthand what mining can mean for a local economy – my father, both grandfathers, and great-grandfather were all miners. I have worked in the mining industry for more than 20 years. Having spent most of my life in and around mining has helped make me who I am today, which is why I'm reaching out to residents of Marathon County to introduce myself and learn more about the communities in the region that you call home.

It is important to have good relationships with people and businesses in the areas where mining holds great potential. I have enjoyed meeting with local leaders and residents in recent weeks, and I was happy to see at a recent meeting of the Marathon County Land Conservation and Zoning Committee that the county is willing to try and find a balance between regulation and economic opportunity for its residents.

At that meeting, the committee moved a mining ordinance to the full County Board for approval. Rather than simply adopt the original, the committee added amendments that give the county the ability to regulate mining while being open to it under the right conditions. There is still work to do, but we support an open process for a good, strong ordinance that facilitates clean, safe, successful mining– and if the full County Board heads in a similar direction as its committee, we anticipate supporting the ordinance.

While there is no guarantee a mine will be developed, we think it is important to form relationships in good faith and build trust with local residents in the event we discover a minable resource. We want to understand local residents' concerns and work with them to make sure that if mining occurs in Marathon County that residents are comfortable with the direction of mining.

Economic studies continue to show that mining can generate hundreds of permanent and indirect jobs in an area like Marathon County. Additionally, the tax revenue generated from an operating mine in the region could exceed millions annually for local, state, and federal

governments – which means more funding for roads, schools, and other services essential to a community.

Of course, in order to be good guests, it's important for us to give in other ways as well. For example, in Menominee County, Aquila has provided upkeep of a boat landing in a river to provide enjoyment and ease of access to area fishermen; adopted highways to help with periodic clean-up of the ditches and right-of-ways; created a scholarship program for high school seniors; provided project tours, informational public meetings, and conducted school and club presentations to provide education about geology, exploration, and mining; become members of area Chambers of Commerce and other civic groups; and donated financially to numerous local causes, charities, and organizations. Ultimately, our goal is to find partners in the community that help us identify ways in which we can create sustainable investments that carry on long after mining has ceased.

Naturally, some groups will be concerned about mining no matter the situation. But this does not have to be an either-or proposition. With modern mining practices, we have the technology available and experience necessary to ensure that mining is safe and protective of the environment – meaning we can have both a strong economy and clean environment.

From start to finish, we will implement disciplined, safe, and sensible requirements in consultation with local communities. We will follow the rules and regulations set by the state of Wisconsin that will result in clean water, clean air, and a vibrant community. Mining can be a win for Marathon County residents who will directly benefit from the economic development.

We look forward to working with Marathon County and all of its communities that have a stake in our project to ensure economic prosperity in the region and preservation of the natural environment that we all enjoy.

*Chantae Lessard is the Director, Social Performance and Engagement for Aquila Resources.*