

## **10 MINE FACILITIES AND THEIR REUSE**

Flambeau Mining Company requested modifications in 1998 to its reclamation plan that would provide benefits to the surrounding communities. The Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources approved the modifications that included the retention of mine buildings, rail spur, and land for industrial development by the Ladysmith Community Industrial Development Corporation. This section discusses the use and reuse of the facilities on the Flambeau Mine site.

### **10.1 WATER TREATMENT FACILITY AND ADMINISTRATION BUILDING**

One of the major concerns of many residents in local communities surrounding the Flambeau Mine was the protection of the Flambeau River water quality and its ecosystem. In addition and of equal importance, was the protection of the groundwater and area wells.

Wisconsin law required that any water discharged from the mine site meet very strict standards, and in some cases, standards that exceed Wisconsin's own drinking water standards. To meet those stringent standards, Flambeau Mining Company designed a state-of-the-art water treatment facility utilizing new technology that allowed Flambeau Mining to deliver on its commitment of environmental protection. Any water that came in contact with 1 percent or more sulfur was treated at the water treatment plant before it was discharged into the Flambeau River. The facility neutralized acids and removed minerals because the treated water had to be extremely clean to protect even the tiniest and sensitive organisms in the Flambeau River's ecosystem. The facility delivered water that met, or in some cases, surpassed the water quality standards established to protect water, fish, and animals.

During the life of the mine, the water treatment facility produced over 600 million gallons of high quality water that was discharged into the river (1:33). Besides exceeding DNR permit standards, the water exceeded local drinking water purity standards.

After mine closure and reclamation, the Ladysmith Community Industrial Development Corporation leased the water treatment facility along with the rail spur, the administration building, and an adjacent 32 acres as an industrial outlot from Flambeau Mining Company on a long-term 30-year agreement. The LCIDC has an additional 30-year renewal option on the industrial outlot.

Due to local concerns about its possible re-opening of the mine in future years, Flambeau Mining Company was required to dismantle and remove the water treatment facility equipment. In 1998, the Flambeau water treatment plant was closed, cleaned, and dismantling of the equipment began. Most of the equipment removed from the treatment facility was used for scrap material or sold to other facilities outside the area. Decommission and removal of the plant's equipment was completed in the spring of 1999.

At a cost of approximately \$2 million dollars to construct the water treatment facility, the potential reuse of the facility for other purposes associated with the water treatment equipment could have had significant impact in attracting additional businesses and jobs to the area. However, due to the requirement that all water treatment equipment be removed, all potential for the water treatment facility equipment was negated. Saving the building shell has resulted in the building's occupancy by the DNR and Xcel Energy.

In 2003, the removal of the railway spur west of State Highway 27 was completed, again due to the original agreements noting the removal of the rail spur if no reuse of the line was found between 1998 and 2003. Most of the rail spur east of State Highway 27 has been preserved due to the rail lines ability to provide service to customers located in the Rusk County Forest Industry Park.

On April 1, 1999, the 32 acre industrial outlot was leased to the LCIDC for a 30 year term. Subleases were developed between the LCIDC and the DNR and Xcel Energy for the mine buildings. Interior renovations to the former mine administration building were completed in 1999 for the relocation of the Wisconsin DNR Ladysmith Service Center.



**Figure 10.1 Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources Ladysmith Service Center**

Conversion of about 3,000 sq. ft. of the former water treatment facility into a DNR maintenance garage was finished in spring of 2000. Approximately 4,000 sq. ft. of the former water treatment plant was converted into a garage and headquarters for Xcel Energy's local electric line maintenance equipment and operations. That project was also completed in spring 2000.



**Figure 10.2 DNR Garage in Forefront and Xcel Energy Line Maintenance Garage**

City of Ladysmith officials indicated during a recent interview that there were some decisions made regarding the long term land use plan for the mine that perhaps did not provide the most ideal outcomes for the communities. For example, the development of the physical facilities—the wastewater treatment plant and the administration building—perhaps should have been designed for long term use and adapted for mining use. Moreover, leaving the open pit and allowing it to fill up with water for use as a lake may have had good results versus complete backfilling of the pit. A good example of where that course of action has been successful is the Wazee Lake Recreation Area in Jackson County, which was created from a discontinued open pit mine. After closing, it was filled up with water to create “the clearest, cleanest, and deepest lake in Wisconsin, per the Jackson County Forestry and Parks Department (6:27). According to information on its website, Wazee Lake is fast becoming one of the most popular scuba diving sites in the Midwest. Other activities exist on site for additional recreational enjoyment including many miles of hiking and gravel surfaced bicycle trails that wind through a mosaic of prairie and forests.