

VISIONWEST

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force as spouses and family members seek employment. He said he thinks the project and the new opportunities that having access to gas would provide could double the county’s population.

Mercer County Commission Chairman Gene Wolf asked about whether smaller communities in Mercer and Oliver counties could access the pipeline as well, with Anderson saying the pipeline would have the capacity to service many entities, including these communities. Hazen Economic Director Myra Savelkoul asked about the impact on propane services, with Brinkman saying he thinks there is room for both natural gas and propane within the communities.

Jessica Johnson, Vice President of External Affairs with Talon Metals, gave an update on the company’s current status regarding its Tamarack Mine location in Minnesota and the review process in that state, as well as an overview for the proposed Beulah minerals processing facility in Mercer County. Ore

from the Minnesota mine is planned to be shipped by rail to the processing facility, making use of the existing BNSF railway line. This facility is being developed with the assistance of a \$114 million grant from the U.S. Department of Energy (awarded during the Biden administration).

Johnson said the primary reasons that the Beulah-area site (the former Dakota Westmoreland mine site) was selected for the processing facility was due to its having the existing railway connection and industrial infrastructure that can be repurposed for Talon’s use, as well as the drier climate in western North Dakota that she said is more conducive to the facility’s operation than the wetter climate in Minnesota.

Currently, the mine site in Minnesota is still under review, with Johnson saying the company has made changes to its initial plan based on the review process and public input there. She said the current timeline for the Minnesota mining portion of the project is to enter construction by the

end of 2027 or beginning of 2028.

“Our goal is to be finding more nickel for America and supporting our domestic supply chain,” Johnson said, noting that the nation’s only current high-grade nickel mine in Michigan is slated to close due to ore deposit depletion.

Johnson said the next steps for the processing facility is to progress with feasibility study test planning and with the environmental assessment for the DOE. She added Talon also hopes to expand its public and community engagement and begin the initial permitting process.

In addition to updates from industry, there were also presentations involving landowners during the Vision ND workshop, emphasizing landowner rights and the relationship between landowners and incoming industry.

Bob Grant with the Northwest Landowners Association talked about the origin of the organization and the importance of landowners working together with each other to ensure their prop-

erty rights are respected. He said the group does not oppose industry or development but wants to ensure that landowners (and the land itself) are treated with dignity and are respected throughout the process.

A later panel, moderated by longtime Vision West member and former Dunn County Commissioner Darryl Dukart and including McKenzie County landowner Gene Veeder and Dunn County landowner Gene Harris, discussed the opportunities and the challenges of having multiple industries and pipelines looking at access through their farming or ranching properties.

Veeder and Harris emphasized the importance of landowners understanding how right-of-way works and having a plan in advance for what they will and will not allow on their properties. Their discussion included working through attorneys to make sure all the details in an agreement are actually beneficial, keeping pipelines and other industrial easements near roads or in particular areas that

leave significant portions of property undisturbed and working directly with companies to address any concerns with workers or contractors to protect their own safety.

Other presenters at the conference included Jim Bougalis, founder and CEO of North American Iron; Chris Ryan, President and COO of Gevo; Dave Ripplinger with NDSU Extension on carbon sequestration as it relates to agriculture; and regulatory authority explanations from Dave Glatt with the North Dakota Department of Environmental Quality and Randy Christmann with the North Dakota Public Service Commission.

“We want the same things,” Laumb said at the end of the workshop. “We want things to get done effectively. We have to work together and use our resources in a sustainable way.”

In addition to the meeting in Beulah last week, Vision West ND is planning a consortium meeting in Hazen on Thursday, Nov. 20.



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