

Martha Minchak

Sept 22, 2025

5420 Old Highway 61,
Proctor, MN 55810

Re: US Steel Corp – Keetac – Wastewater Permits and Variance Request Comments – Mine Site

Dear Ms. Handeland,

My name is Martha Minchak. I live in Midway Township in Southeastern St Louis County, MN. I worked as a Wildlife Technician and Assistant Area Manager for the MN Dept of Natural Resources for 38 years. Over my career with the DNR, I reviewed water permit applications across northern Minnesota. Over my 25 years in the Twin Ports area I have worked on restoring the St Louis River Estuary (SLRE) and several trout streams feeding into it. I have also worked to restore Manoomin (Wild Rice) to suitable bays in the estuary. I am also a Manoomin harvester and consider Manoomin to be a relative and native being, deserving of respect and protection. I would like to submit the following comments pertaining to the Wastewater Permit application and Variance Request submitted by US Steel for their Keetac mine site.

I attended the public open house held by your staff in Virginia, MN earlier this month. I applaud your staff for their professionalism and patience in presenting the facts about the permit applications and variance requests, answering questions respectfully and to the best of their ability, and providing the historic background of the sulfate standard, reevaluation of the sulfate standard, and US Steel's continued non-compliance with their existing permits and failure to initiate treatment of their discharge water to meet the state's wild rice sulfate standard.

I was appalled to hear so many elected officials oppose the current sulfate standard and advocate for more delays and further research on the impact of sulfate on Manoomin and its role in mercury methylation and the resulting fish consumption advisories. Essentially they were openly opposing work completed by your agency and others to ensure that our fish and Manoomin are protected for the benefit of all Minnesotans and safe to eat. They also seem to oppose clean water and control of mercury in the foodchain, of which humans are a link.

Many people commented on "old science", "poor science" or pitted concern for clean water against concern for healthy communities and jobs. These arguments are red herrings meant to further delay compliance with the sulfate standard. To my knowledge science and chemistry have not changed since 1973 and the sulfate standard has held up to recent testing and reevaluation by agency and research professionals. Your staff clearly demonstrated, using economic reporting by the corporation, that US Steel can afford to implement treatment technology that would allow them to come into compliance with the sulfate standard, still maintain operations and still make a profit. As several people commented at the open house, the process and technology used in treating their wastewater would provide more long-term, permanent jobs to install, operate and maintain as long as the Keetac facility is operational.

Again, I applaud the efforts of your staff to research, evaluate and promote the adherence to the current sulfate standard to protect Manoomin, clean water, and sustainable and accessible wild foods

for the benefit of all Minnesota citizens. I would encourage you to deny a variance to further delay compliance with the current sulfate standard in the wastewater permit application. Minnesotans deserve better including a sustainable, clean environment, clean water and safe and edible wild foods.

Thank you for considering these comments.

Sincerely,

Martha Minchak

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mminchak27@gmail.com