

Wendy Ulrich

Manoomin Was Here First

I am a Minnesotan who wants to protect wild rice for future Minnesotans.

Before there was a Minnesota Pollution Control Agency or a U.S. Steel— before there was even a state of Minnesota— wild rice covered the entire territory that would become the state. In a world without us, it lived in abundance. A 2023 Wild Rice Legislative Report says so. That same report says that today, even when conditions are favorable, only 64,000 acres of wild rice remain, and the quality of that grain is "being degraded and diminished" (2023 MN Dept. of Agriculture "Wild Rice Legislative Report").

But to say that wild rice in Minnesota is dying is not the whole story. We are killing the rice. Across the state, by prioritizing and permitting corporate mining, factory farming, and boat access over the safety of the plant, state actions are actively killing its state grain. Minnesota's past allowance of accumulated sulfate pollution is a key stressor that has left wild rice "in dire need of protections" (2023 MN Dept. of Agriculture "Wild Rice Legislative Report"). The 10 mg/L sulfate standard is one such protection. I urge this Pollution Control Agency to apply that standard 10 mg/L limit to the Keetac mine without variance because wild rice is an ancestor that has the inherent right to coexist with humans; U.S. Steel profits have no such right.