

Mayor of Silver Bay Wade LeBlanc (Wade LeBlanc)

Hello,

I serve as Mayor of Silver Bay, a community whose history and future are closely tied to Minnesota's mining industry. I am writing to provide comment on the proposed enforcement of the 10 mg/L sulfate standard in Keetac's permit.

I fully support protecting wild rice, but the 10 mg/L sulfate limit is not based on current science and does not reflect natural conditions in our state. In Minnesota, most groundwater sulfate levels are below 250 mg/L, yet many regions—particularly in the southwest and northeast—exceed 1,000 mg/L naturally. The Keetac proposed limit is even stricter than the sulfate levels found in common bottled water, such as San Pellegrino (445 mg/L). Because sulfates cannot be economically removed from water at this scale, this limit is simply unattainable.

Beyond water quality, the proposed standard threatens the foundation of our communities. Our schools rely heavily on the Permanent School Fund, which receives nearly 70% of its revenue from iron mining leases. In the 2024–2025 school year alone, \$58 million was distributed to 850,000 students statewide. From 2012–2021, iron mining contributed \$230 million to this fund. These dollars are critical to ensuring opportunity for every Minnesota child, whether they live in Silver Bay, the Iron Range, or elsewhere across the state.

Instead of enforcing an outdated, one-size-fits-all rule, I urge MPCA to adopt a modern, site-specific sulfate standard. Such a standard should be based on the best available science and account for the many variables that influence wild rice growth, including sediment conditions, sunlight, hydrology, and climate-related changes such as extreme rainfall and warmer winters.

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