

I am submitting this comment in relation to public notice of draft NPDES permits MN0055948 and MN0031879 for the US Steel Keetac Tailings basin and mining area, respectively.

I was born and raised in Ely and have spent 48 of my 53 years living and working on the iron range. During that time, I have cultivated a lifestyle of taking advantage of what northern MN can offer. From hunting and fishing to canoeing/camping in the BWCA to snowmobiling in the winter and ATVing in the summer, I consider myself a steward of the land and am very concerned with its future.

The mining industry provides the infrastructure and economic opportunity for thousands of people to call this area "home", me included. The area mines have demonstrated to me that they follow the rules and regulations placed on them by both state and federal agencies, and this is re-enforced by the employees who work at those mines (me included) that expect and require their employers to protect our natural resources.

The current sulfate standard of 10mg/L is not realistic from an economic, environmental, or technical standpoint. For contrast, a bottle of water has 70+ mg/L of sulfate, the average drinking water from a municipality is around 250. Interestingly, there is no other governmental entity (state, provincial, or federal) in North America that regulates sulfate levels. Modern science proves that sulfide, not sulfate, is the compound that may affect wild rice, and for sulfide to form it is dependent on several factors which include bacteria, organic carbon, iron levels, and water flow.

I believe that the standard has nothing to with protecting wild rice and everything to do with eliminating an entire industry, how else can it be explained that there are over 900 facilities across Minnesota that discharge into wild rice waterways that have not received the same enforcement pressure as Keetac? The MPCA needs to stop playing politics with an industry that has operated on the iron range for over 100 years, has provided millions of dollars of revenue to the workforce and billions of dollars in taxes to the state. In my adult working career, they have shown to me that they follow the regulations, operate with environmental best practices in mind, and have genuine concern for our region.

In summary, I urge the MPCA to refrain from including sulfate limits in Keetac's permits. I also urge the MPCA to abide by the 2011 law and update the 10mg/L sulfate standard that the state of Minnesota has recognized as being incorrect.

Sincerely,

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