

Calvin Warwas

Dear MPCA,

My name is Cal Warwas.

I am a son of the Iron Range, and still live on the Range.

I am a 3rd generation miner.

I am a 2nd generation Steelworker in the Local 1938. My father and I have accrued over 60 years of combined experience in taconite mining operations and maintenance.

In my 29 years of mining, I've learned a lot about the industry that sustains where I grew up, and where I choose to raise my family:

- That mining here is the financial backbone of the entirety of Northeastern Minnesota.
- That well over 10,000 jobs are directly connected to mine operations here.
- That our communities thrive ONLY because of this industry, which not only pays family-sustaining, single income-earner wages, but also because of the 100's of millions of dollars that it pays in production taxes, utility fees, and supplies which are often sourced from local vendors.
- That we are an isolated rural community that has mineral wealth to offer. Without mining, we are not simply able to reinvent our economy. We cannot turn to farming in this climate and soil (and forestland). We do our best to add other industry and business, but nothing has been found for us (in decades of trying) that can replace mining but rather only compliment the economy that we already have.
- To borrow a phrase: Mining isn't something that is done TO us but is done FOR us. What is not grown to sustain life, must be mined. Minerals literally make life possible here on earth. Also, iron miners are not victims of this industry, but beneficiaries of it. Who else benefits? The entirety of Minnesota and the United States of America, which has a downstream benefit of roughly 11 million other affected individuals connected to steel making and manufacturing.

There is a lot of consternation about the effects of sulfate on wild rice waters, which has been proven to be largely misplaced concern. Wild rice is a crop of nature (it's in the name), and just like other crops that are intentionally planted, there are some years wild rice doesn't thrive how it may have in the past. We have weather extremes that shift from year to year, water levels, and a lot of animals in the wild that have all taken turns affecting the growth potential and the harvest of the rice in question. As to our water quality, it is well known that NE Minnesota has the best water quality in the entire state, which proves out our stewardship on this and many other potential issues.

As you now know, what is done with the sulfate "standard" is a Minnesota issue, and not a mining discharge issue. Clearly, mining has become the scapegoat for talking about harm to the sustainability of wild rice, which is both fiction and fallacy. Our mines are the target of opportunism by people who don't want to know the truth about the vital work that we do here on the Range, and who also don't realize the environmental stewardship and reclamation work that we already do. As you know, in this modern age our work is heavily regulated, and not just large

companies coming in to take value, leave messes, and depart with bags of money. Each operation here on the Range is comprised of real people that have real families with real children that attend our schools, staff our local retail stores, and help to make our lives complete in this rural landscape.

We also support a community of retirees that depend on the working class to pay their share of property taxes to our county and city governments, which support all locally provided services. Without mining and mining adjacent workers actually working and paying these bills, our retirees will be forced to pick up new and outrageous levy increases that will surely happen when the rest of us depart the Iron Range to find employment elsewhere. The welfare monies needed to support the remaining populace, in the event of massive mine closures, would be on a never-before-seen scale in Minnesota, and that is guaranteed. This state needs more people in the workforce, not less.

I mention mine closures because it has been recognized that our Minnesota mining industries cannot compete in a global marketplace with the kinds of constraints that are being introduced as solutions to the professed Keetac situation on sulfate. The technology does not exist to effectively and efficiently remove sulfate from discharge waters; furthermore, the proposed construction and cost of operation is monumental and cost prohibitive. As an aside, I would mention that the energy consumed for a reverse osmosis system to treat the volume of water needed would be astronomical. All this at a time of higher costs for energy, which has seen increased demand and decreased availability. These things are bad for consumers, especially those locally that would no longer have a means of employment.

I grew up during the 1980's when we saw massive mine closures and layoffs during a time of economic downturn in the domestic steel industry. People were departing the Range in a wake of bankruptcies, and property values plummeted to historic lows. Schoolkids lost friends that they would never see again. Families were ripped apart as so many had to leave the region, and some left the state. My mom and dad barely had what we needed to keep food on the table and pay our bills. Not having job opportunity was stressful, and we were not able to continue to build our home, which was under construction. Today, I'm told that food insecurity and need through our local food shelves is at an all-time high, and I would not want to see our mining community (a major contributor to those entities) need to add to the number of people that need that same assistance.

Not mentioned yet, but critical, is that the sulfate limit for water needs to be addressed in a scientific and reasonable way. There are nearly 1000 entities responsible for tracking sulfate discharges in this state, but many of them are municipalities that could never afford to make the kind of upgrades that are proposed to "fix" this issue at the current standard.

In closing, I believe Keetac needs to be granted the requested variance to continue operations. Our other mines will need the same reasonable response in the near future as well. We must work together to establish a workable standard that is truly sustainable for all affected citizens. We must also commit to studying wild rice issues with restoration in mind, to truly bolster the health and well-being of nature. But we cannot go on blaming one potential element to any momentary decline in the growth of wild rice.

Respectfully,

State Representative Cal Warwas
Serving the heart of the Iron Range in district 7B

