

Elyria Grote

I am a New Orleanian who wants to ensure that all people and place are healthy for generations to come. As a New Orleanian the proposed permit by Keetac will provide a quick solution for a company which will have far greater negative impacts on people, culture, water health, and biodiversity. Any law, bill or permit threatening any singular aspect of the list above is one that must immediately be denied. As the water connects us all, decisions made in Minnesota impact life and health in New Orleans. In our own way, New Orleanians battle health issues caused by refineries along our coast and river. The toxins produced, which leech into our water, or are often directly dumped in our waters, have been directly linked to disproportionate cases of cancer in specific places.

Furthermore, this is about undoing wrongs committed over generations. From black communities in New Orleans being forced to buy or sell property near refineries to indigenous peoples around the nation who have their culture and land devastated in both direct and indirect ways.

Wild rice (manoomin in Ojibwe and psíj in Dakota) is a "superfood" that requires no pesticides or fertilizers to grow. Wild rice is a naturally fat-free and cholesterol-free food that is dense in protein and is a powerful antioxidant and lipid-lowering agent. It was a key component of Indigenous diets in your region before disruption of traditional foodways. But as the U.S. pushed tribes to reservations and replaced those traditional diets with commodity rations, it triggered health effects that persist even now. Today, Indigenous Minnesotans are disproportionately obese (Minnesota Department of Health: Adult Obesity), and are twice as likely as their neighbors to have diabetes (America's Health Rankings). I ask the MPCA to deny a variance from the 10 mg/L sulfate standard because uncultivated wild rice depends on clean water, and that manoomin or psíj is critical to reestablishing the health and food sovereignty of these Minnesotans.

But wild rice is more than just a food on their table. It is a species that is central to biodiversity in Minnesota. More than 17 species of wildlife listed in the MNDNR's Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy as "species of greatest conservation need" use wild rice lakes as habitat for reproduction or foraging. But even non-threatened species benefit from healthy wild rice stands. Duck hunters rely on wild rice stands for cover, fishermen know that rice stands are a food source for amphibian and fish populations, and birders enjoy the variety of migrating waterfowl who feed at rice stands.

Please apply the 10 mg/L sulfate standard to the Keetac mine without variance because protecting wild rice protects us all.