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Subject: MPCA - U.S. Steel Keetac Draft NPDES/SDS Permits - Impaired Waters (meeting follow-up)
Date: Wednesday, August 13, 2025 8:43:25 AM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)
[Impaired Waters Keetac.png](#)

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Hi all,

In the meeting this Monday, Aug. 11, between environmental groups and MPCA staff, I discussed the importance of providing an identification and map of all immediate downstream waters. I was not able to figure out the permissions system to share the current version of WaterLegacy's ArcGIS map with virtual meeting participants.

In addition to Hay Lake, MPCA's 2024 Impaired Waters Section 303(d) list identifies the Southwest Bay of Swan Lake as impaired for the production of wild rice due to excessive sulfate. O'Brien Lake is listed by MPCA as impaired for mercury in fish tissue. It appears that these bodies of water receive flow from Keetac mine and tailings basin features. The 2011 permitting documents include the following:

“Surface drainage from the tailings basin area, in the form of surface run-off from the exterior dikes, flows to the West Swan River, unnamed wetlands, Hay Creek to Swan Lake, Reservoir 2, Reservoir 2 North, and Welcome Creek.”

“Mine pit dewatering from the Mesabi Chief Pit may be pumped and discharged through pipe outfall SD003, at an average rate of 5.85 MGD, to O'Brien Creek, which flows to the O'Brien Reservoir.”

In researching impaired waters, I reviewed both the MPCA's 2024 Impaired Waters Section 303(d) list and a spreadsheet of MPCA "allfish" mercury in fish tissue data which seems to be dated January 19, 2024. That data indicates that the O'Brien Reservoir at Nashwauk, as well as O'Brien Lake, has fish tissue mercury exceeding Minnesota's water quality standard of 0.2 mg/kg. Please let us know if there is a spreadsheet with more recent "allfish" mercury data. If so, WaterLegacy will request it through the Data Practices Act.

The attached map is based on WaterLegacy's work in collaboration with the University of Minnesota on protecting wild rice (Manoomin). The map was developed by University of Minnesota Climate Corps staff based on publicly available data layers. I added the names of Hay Lake and O'Brien Lake and may make additional clarifications before submitting

this or a similar map with WaterLegacy's comments on the Keetac permits. If you have any questions about the map or the information we are using to identify downstream impaired waters or suggested corrections for this information, please contact me by email or phone.

Best regards,
Paula

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Impaired Waters Directly Downstream of U.S. Steel Keetac Mine & Tailings Basin

