



**United Steelworkers Local 2660**

P.O. Box 158

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August 20, 2025

Commissioner Katrina Kessler  
Minnesota Pollution Control Agency  
520 Lafayette Road N  
St. Paul, MN 55155-4194

Subject: Request for Practical and Science-Based Solutions on Sulfate Discharge Standards

Dear Commissioner Kessler,

I have spent over 17 years working at Keetac in various roles, from shift mechanic to my current position as a Mine Electrician, and more than half of my life connected to the mining industry. Like many families on the Iron Range, mine has deep roots here. Both of my parents were born and raised in Hibbing, and although the economic downturn of the 1980s forced us to leave temporarily, we returned because this region is home.

Today, I am deeply concerned that the Iron Range is facing economic pressures similar to those of the 1980s—but with even greater challenges. The sulfate discharge requirements currently under review for Keetac's water permits, if implemented as proposed, would impose significant costs and an unrealistic timeline. These requirements could undermine our ability to compete with foreign suppliers and threaten the stability of thousands of local families who rely on this industry.

Despite the proposed restrictions, there remains no clear scientific evidence showing that lowering sulfate levels below what's already legally allowed in bottled drinking water would improve wild rice yields in Hay Lake and Hay Creek. Implementing costly standards without definitive environmental benefit risks jeopardizing not only our operations but the economic health of the entire region.

Keetac has historically been considered a swing operation, but recent investments—including a \$150 million direct-reduced (DR) plant—have provided hope for greater stability and diversification. That progress is now at risk. If these sulfate standards move forward without a balanced, science-based approach, the impact will extend beyond our gates, affecting surrounding communities, local economies, and future opportunities.

As the President of USW Local 2660, I want to emphasize that our union members care deeply about protecting the environment. We live here, our families live here, and we are committed to environmental stewardship in our daily operations. We believe it is possible to safeguard both our natural resources and the livelihoods of the people who call Northern Minnesota home.



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I strongly urge the MPCA to work collaboratively with Keetac, legislators, local communities, and other stakeholders to develop a realistic, science-driven solution that protects the environment while ensuring the long-term viability of our industry and our region.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jacob Friend". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial "J" and "F".

Jacob Friend  
President  
USW Local 2660