

Kneemueller, Ashley (MPCA)

From: danielengelhart@everyactioncustom.com on behalf of Daniel Engelhart
<danielengelhart@everyactioncustom.com>
Sent: Tuesday, September 2, 2025 10:24 PM
To: Kneemueller, Ashley (MPCA)
Subject: RE: U.S. Steel Keetac Mine and Tailings Basin Permits (MN0031879 and MN0055948) and Application for Variance

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Dear Minnesota Pollution Control Agency Staff,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the U.S. Steel Keetac Mine and Tailings Basin permits and U.S. Steel's application for a variance. I would like to support the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) and strengthen enforcement of water quality standards that protect Minnesota wild rice, fish, and human health.

I support these MPCA actions related to the U.S. Steel Keetac Mine and Tailings Basin Permits:

- 1) I agree with MPCA that U.S. Steel permits should require compliance with Minnesota's wild rice sulfate standard of 10 parts per million (mg/L) at both the Keetac Mine and Tailings Basin. I understand that draft permit limits of 14 mg/L monthly average and 24 mg/L daily maximum are based on this standard.
- 2) I agree with MPCA that U.S. Steel should be denied a variance from compliance with the sulfate standard. A variance is a specific exception to the rules, and U.S. Steel's resistance to the expense of water quality treatment does not provide grounds to avoid the standard.
- 3) I support MPCA's requirement that U.S. Steel monitor waste streams at both the Keetac Mine and Tailings Basin for sulfate and other pollutants. It seems that this should have been required a long time ago.

However, I'm concerned that the draft permits have some gaps. The permits should be strengthened in the following ways:

- 1) MPCA should not give U.S. Steel another five years before they actually have to meet Minnesota's wild rice sulfate standard. Sulfate limits were set in Keetac permits in 2011, and studies on treatment were done and approved by MPCA almost a decade ago. MPCA should give U.S. Steel no more than two years to achieve full compliance with wild rice sulfate limits.
- 2) MPCA should revise the Keetac permits to require groundwater monitoring, especially the groundwater beneath and adjacent to the Tailings Basin. This monitoring is needed to protect groundwater and to help determine if pollutants released through groundwater are causing or adding to violations of surface water standards.

3) MPCA should require U.S. Steel to test wastewater discharge from day one to make sure it is not toxic to aquatic life, rather than waiting for three years before toxicity testing. MPCA should also require new biological assessments the first year of the permit to determine if downstream fish and macroinvertebrates are impaired.

4) In addition to monitoring for sulfate, MPCA should require monitoring for mercury in surface waters and should update testing for mercury in fish tissue downstream of Keetac.

I appreciate the steps MPCA is taking to control sulfate pollution from the U.S. Steel Keetac Mine and Tailings Basin. But I would also ask that MPCA revise the draft permits to avoid delay and to better protect groundwater, wild rice, fish, and the health of people who eat fish that are now contaminated with mercury.

Thank you for considering my comments,

Sincerely,

Daniel Engelhart

525 19th Ave NE Minneapolis, MN 55418-4418 danielengelhart@gmail.com

Kneemueller, Ashley (MPCA)

From: pampferer@everyactioncustom.com on behalf of Pam Ampferer
<pampferer@everyactioncustom.com>
Sent: Tuesday, September 2, 2025 10:14 PM
To: Kneemueller, Ashley (MPCA)
Subject: RE: U.S. Steel Keetac Mine and Tailings Basin Permits (MN0031879 and MN0055948) and Application for Variance

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Thank you for considering my comments,

Sincerely,

Pam Ampferer

2083 Wellesley Ave Saint Paul, MN 55105-1232 pampferer@gmail.com

Kneemueller, Ashley (MPCA)

From: tsullivan79@everyactioncustom.com on behalf of Thomas Sullivan <tsullivan79@everyactioncustom.com>
Sent: Tuesday, September 2, 2025 2:59 PM
To: Kneemueller, Ashley (MPCA)
Subject: RE: U.S. Steel Keetac Mine and Tailings Basin Permits (MN0031879 and MN0055948) and Application for Variance

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I believe the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (MPCA) can and should strengthen the proposed Keetac permits because:

1. Compliance with sulfate standards is delayed unnecessarily.

The draft permits would not require Keetac to comply with Minnesota's sulfate standards until April 30, 2030. But from 2011 through 2016, MPCA already completed a full planning, study, and testing process for Keetac's sulfate reduction treatment. There's no reason to start over. In fact, the U.S. EPA told MPCA in September 2024 that further delay in compliance with the wild rice sulfate standard would not be appropriate.

2. Groundwater protections are missing.

State law requires groundwater protection, but the draft permits do not include it. There are no groundwater monitoring locations, and the permits don't disclose how much polluted wastewater is seeping into groundwater—especially from the tailings basin.

3. Aquatic life is left at risk.

The permits would allow Keetac to wait three years before even beginning to test whether its discharge is toxic to aquatic life—without any justification for the delay. Beyond that, biological assessments are only required "once every five years" and no start date is even specified. With no testing, there are no pollution limits for salts and ions that are known to kill sensitive aquatic species.

4. Mercury monitoring is incomplete.

The draft permits add mercury monitoring at discharge points but don't require monitoring in surface waters. Downstream waters are already impaired for mercury in fish. Sulfate pollution increases mercury release from sediments and its buildup in the food chain, yet this critical connection is not addressed.

Sincerely,

Thomas Sullivan
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